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*The*  
FORSAKEN FOUNTAIN

*Author of*

THE GOOD PAGAN'S FAILURE  
TIME AND THE TIMELESS  
THE LIFE OF FAITH

*The*  
FORSAKEN  
FOUNTAIN

BY  
ROSALIND MURRAY

Thou hast forsaken the  
fountain of wisdom  
BARUCH III. 12

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# I

## KNOWLEDGE AND VISION

“Perception denotes a certain experiential knowledge. It is this which is properly called wisdom.”

*Summa Theologica* (I<sup>a</sup>, Q.43, A.5, ad 2)





*Can We Know?*

When St Thomas was a little boy we are told that he edified his masters by asking, "What is God?"

It must have been something in the way he asked that impressed them, for in itself it is the question we all ask: but St Thomas was in a better position to get an answer than is the modern child, or indeed the modern adult.

It may sound a paradox in a Godless age to say that we are all asking "What is God?"; we do not of course explicitly frame our question in these terms, but it is implicitly implied in all our asking.

"What is reality?"

"What is beauty?"

"What is truth?"

"What is goodness?"

even,

"What is life?" and "What am I?"

These are the forms in which we frame our question; they are, moreover, real questions in themselves, each demanding its own specific answer, but ultimately they all depend upon the answer to the primal question: "What is God?"

Apart from God, without relation to God, there is no truth nor goodness nor beauty, nothing is real, there is no life, no "I".

This is, at least, the Christian position. Christian philosophers will tell us that the subsidiary questions should lead us step by step, inevitably, up to the final question "What is God?"; but there is a sense in which the final question must be first also, inasmuch as the final Cause is First Cause also, without which nothing is, that is. "God is the efficient, the exemplar, the final Cause of all things";<sup>1</sup> and it is demonstrably not the case that the step-by-step ascent does of itself and necessarily lead on to that direct and conscious search for God which is implicit in it.

The works of almost any modern philosopher present a lamentable example of such abortive and frustrated searching; reason without faith; the pathetic ramblings of unilluminated reason. Indeed the complicated ratiocination of Kant or Hegel, of Heidegger or even Croce, may well induce in the non-philosophic reader an anti-intellectual revolt, which is as dangerous as it is natural.

"What is the use of all this argument which only leads at last to a 'dead end'? If these, and such as these, are the trained minds, let us content ourselves with simple faith."

We call to mind the exhortation to us to become as little children and tend to interpret it too literally. It is much easier to discard all thinking than to distinguish between false and true; but to think is not necessarily to think wrongly, to reason need not be to reason falsely; nor can right reason be opposed to faith.

There is in this, as in all deeper truth, a necessary and creative tension between two contrasted poles which must ultimately be fused.

<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, Ia, Q.44, a.4.

If once we bring ourselves to recognize this, we are inclined to reject the search for truth from a new angle; it is no longer rejection of thought itself as useless, but rather that a fuller realization of the difficulty of right thinking leads us to give up so hard a venture. The nature of God, of goodness, truth, or beauty, is not to be inquired into by us; these questions are to be left to the experts.

In one sense this must be the right conclusion; the more we begin to understand the intricacies of philosophy, or theology, the more alarmingly shall we recognize the vast opportunity for error, and the inadequacy of our own knowledge.

Yet this is not the end, it cannot be, for the more our thoughts have dwelt upon them, the more we are impelled to ask our questions; our minds and hearts are hungry for an answer that will, in some measure, satisfy them.

And here we are faced with a new difficulty. In any attempt to formulate a truth of metaphysical reality there are two distinct points to bear in mind. Firstly, how to express the actual idea with as great an exactitude as may be; secondly, how adequately to convey the truth in question to the receiving mind.

These two points are not identical.

If the second of these objects is an important part of our problem, and in any expression of ideas it is bound to be so, then it is essential that we should find some medium of correspondence between our own minds and those of our hearers. We must be able to relate our ideas, what we ourselves have learned or understood, with some corresponding experience of theirs; only in

so far as we are able to do this can they in their turn make them their own.

The philosopher or the theologian may produce his answer to our question in terms of unimpeachable exactitude, but if it is not brought into relation with the experience of the questioner it can neither enlighten nor satisfy him.

Question and answer may follow exactly, problem and solution fit each other, yet nothing has really been apprehended. The entire transaction may take place on a superficial level without any deeper understanding of what the ideas discussed in fact imply.

This method is at all times popular as an educational short cut,<sup>1</sup> but answers of this kind, though sometimes useful in the sense that the old Latin grammar jingles may be, afford no substitute for understanding.

It is not in fact an answer as such that we ask for. That is easily obtained. It is an answer that will be enlightening, one that our hungry minds can take hold of and relive in terms of our own experience, that we can make our own and re-express in our own terms, in our own lives. "*Qui expertus non fuerit, non intelliget.*"<sup>2</sup>

It is the objective truth for which we ask, the real truth, not watered down nor over-simplified, not vulgarized and cheapened till it becomes a travesty of itself, yet brought within the compass of our minds by some process of representation.

Are we demanding the impossible? How far is it in fact practicable to reinterpret the truths of metaphysics or religion in terms intelligible to the non-expert

<sup>1</sup> The Catechism is the supreme example.

<sup>2</sup> St Anselm, *De Fid. Trin.*, cap. 2.

mind, and at the same time to preserve their essence?

It is the integral problem of translation, ultimately, of all art, for it involves the fundamental question of the relation between apprehension and expression, and this is but one of many different cases in which the seemingly incompatible has to be synthesized and made one if we are to attain to understanding.

The attitude of the philosopher, for whom the re-expression of his knowledge in terms intelligible to the non-expert is degradation, finds a paradoxical support in many forms of modern art in which the attempt to be intelligible has been abandoned in favour of pure intransitive expression. The medium of expression in each case has become a cipher code which must conceal and safeguard, rather than communicate, its meaning.

In one sense both philosopher and artist are justified; in so far as their special vision or knowledge is incapable of apprehension by the vulgar, they are right in their refusal to adulterate it, but in too violent a reaction from even the prevalent vulgarization, there is a danger.

Much of the obscurity both of modern art and expert knowledge can be seen as in itself an over-simplification, the abandonment of one essential element in the necessary dialectic between apprehension and re-expression. It is far easier and less costly to remain happily unintelligible, but this is to shelve the problem, not to solve it.

To God alone is it sufficient to contemplate His own sufficiency; for human beings, all that has been received must be re-expressed in some form, and such re-expression implies transmission if it is to achieve its fullness. The vertical must include the horizontal.

Properly understood, there is a world of difference between the equalitarian denial of a truth and knowledge beyond our comprehension, and the plea we are now putting forward for an intelligible re-expression of this same deeper truth and higher knowledge in a medium that relates them to our own experience.

True knowledge can be no enemy of truth; if it is practicable in some way to deepen the general non-expert understanding of metaphysical and religious truth, such understanding must proportionately vivify our recognition of the infinities beyond our grasp. Humility must be the outcome of any deepening of vision.

It is with this conviction that the following pages have been written by one with no claims to any specialist's knowledge as an attempt to meet a common need.

## II

### *Knowledge*

The distinction between knowledge and ignorance, between the expert and the untrained mind, is by no means the only difficulty in an attempt to reach the true nature of reality.

If in the questions we are concerned to answer, as to the ultimate nature of what is, we found that all wise men were in agreement and only fools were found to differ from them, the task before us would be simple; it would be merely to acquire more knowledge; but our first glimpse at the philosophers has shown that this is very far from being the case. Mere knowledge in itself brings no agreement, it cannot in itself, and as such,

lead to truth. What we require is not more knowledge only, but knowledge of a different kind, a difference of quality not quantity; not merely knowledge as such, but true knowledge, and this confronts us with a further point of controversy.

The demand for the re-expression of final truths in the medium of our own apprehension assumes the reality of objective truth, independent of our minds yet capable of being known by them, and it assumes the possibility of right thinking and a right belief.

There is a widespread tendency to-day to deny both these suppositions, to minimize the contradictions in philosophic and religious thought through a general depreciation of constructive thinking in favour of tolerant agnosticism; the attitude of mind for which, since nothing can be known, it does not matter what personal point of view we may prefer.

That nothing is true since nothing can be known may seem at first to be a profound solution, but it is in fact superficial and tells us nothing. It is an intellectual "as you were", as has been immemorially pointed out. No one, moreover, is able to act upon it; every one assumes his own exceptions to the general supposed scepticism.

Subjectivism is as unconvincing: "Truth is different for different people; what I believe is true, is true for me."

No one is really satisfied with such a concession, which indeed makes nonsense of all knowledge.

Idealists and subjectivists have lost sight of the essential meaning of the words truth and reality.

The relativity of all truth, and consequently of our

knowledge of it, is often urged against the attempt at any positive answer to our transcendental questions. Reality is to be apprehended under so many and such subjective forms that the effort to construct from them a unified conception is to constrict the multiplicity of being. This may be, at first sight, a real difficulty, but it should not remain so. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that a conception of reality which would in fact ignore or minimize its almost limitless complexity would not be the true knowledge we are seeking. It would be, as usual, one of two forms of over-simplification.

We shall perpetually find this element of apparent contradiction in any serious attempt to understand the inner nature of reality, a point at which two seeming incompatibles must in some way be synthesized and fused if a creative truth is to emerge. And there is always lying in wait for us the impulse to resolve the impending conflict, not by true synthesis but by rejection of one or other of the elements of apparent conflict.

In the case before us, we are required to conceive a fusion of the ideas of the one and the many, a multiplicity in unity, and this conception in itself implies the further closely related synthesis of an objective truth to-be-perceived, and the personal image of it, in the individual receiving mind.

There may be, and there are, great variations in our personal apprehensions, great and bewildering differences in response to an identical experience. This we must recognize to the full if we are to attempt to grasp the richness of "what is". But if in the multiplicity apprehended we lose sight of the central reality, we



have again, through over-simplification, failed to attain the creative synthesis.

There is a vast range of potential synthesis in the apparently incompatible, but there is also real contradiction between the really incompatible.

When more deeply seen, this and that individual point of view will appear as but different aspects of one truth, complementary and not conflicting; but there will no less surely be a point at which the potential synthesis is ended, at which we have to recognize and maintain: "If this is true, then that is false—these views, these statements, are truly mutually exclusive."

That "a thing cannot be and not be at the same time under the same aspect", is neither the truism it may at first appear to be, nor yet the illusion that modern relativists would suppose it.

The true knowledge, then, at which we aim implies discrimination and right judgement between apparent and real contradiction; this means, that deeper vision through which we see the objective and unchanging truth under its varying formalities, and at the same time, with equal clarity, discern the limits of the potential unification.

The answer given to St Thomas's question was, we are to suppose, unsatisfying in that his *Summa* is presented to us as his own eventual answer to it; yet we can rest assured that what was told him would have contained at least part of the truth.

The modern child who should ask, "What is God?" is likely to be told that God is a "superstition" or "make-believe". If he is old enough, this may be amplified to "God is a hypothesis of wishful thinking".

The view that God is superstition or illusion cannot, at any depth, be reconciled with the Christian conviction that he is first and final cause of all that is, nor, in more generally appealing terms, that "He is my Lord, my Life, my All".

If one of these two views be true the other is false, yet people equally equipped to judge, equally sincere, so it would seem, in their desire for truth, are found to differ on this essential issue. The existence and nature of God, as the Christian envisages Him, is in fact the primal question on which all ensuing differences depend. It will be found impossible to differ on this fundamental issue and yet be in agreement on all besides. The extent to which this primal difference in our attitude to God pervades and determines our attitude in all other subjects is only gradually discovered as we consider these subjects in themselves. There is no field of thought or feeling or action in which the difference in our relation to God is not, on a deeper view, reflected.

### III

#### *Experience*

In the relation of truth to the receiving mind we have assumed not only the existence of a reality outside our minds, but also the possibility and the need for this reality to be experienced. This raises the further controversial question as to the value of personal experience as a means to knowledge. This is, as is well known, a subject on which the experts differ profoundly. Both in philosophy and religious thought we find a bewildering disagreement, not only as to the value of experience

but as to its nature. What *is* experience? In what actually does it consist? We have indeed but added a new question to those for which we are seeking an answer.

Just as the subjectivists mistrust the attempt at positive constructive thought, as being at once impracticable and constricting, so we shall find on the part of the extremer rationalists a corresponding mistrust of the subjective element in experience.

Some such mistrust is natural in view of the common tendency to claim the sanction of "personal experience" for every vague, emotional reaction, but the true use of experience as a means to knowledge requires clear thought and a detachment entirely alien to emotionalism.

It is an elementary mistake to judge of anything by its abuse; we might as reasonably identify the abstract thought of metaphysics with the statistics of a government Blue Book and so condemn it as uninspiring.

Experience in itself is not knowledge; but knowledge must be related to experience, and from one point of view all speculation can be regarded as an attempt to bring within our reach, till we have mastered it, some aspect of the multiplicity of being; and to master it is to experience it.

Personal experience, indeed, so far from being an effortless short cut to perfect knowledge is but one element, one phase, in the complex process of understanding, requiring, and at the same time ensuring, the recurrent exercise of reason. It is none the less an essential element in any completed rhythm of apprehension, and, ultimately, its consummation.

Just as the flux of individual impressions, unrelated

and unordered by constructive thought, leads nowhere, so abstract reasoning, however exact, remains itself un-vital and unreal if not both rooted in and leading up to the immediate knowledge of experience.

The value of truth is ultimately *per se* a value in itself, quite independent of its effect upon us, and there is a sense in which pragmatic proof can be regarded as a degradation of the whole concept of truth in itself. To say "It works, and that is all that matters" is to repudiate the very search for truth we are engaged in, but quite slight shifting of the emphasis and intention gives us, not "It works and that is what matters", but "this is what it means in terms of my own knowledge." Not substitution of a subjective standard for the objective truth of abstract reason, but re-inforcement of the conceptual abstraction by an immediate testimony.

The various proofs of the existence of God, from St Thomas's *Quinque Vie* to the individual sanctification of the original Wesleyan, offer a comprehensive illustration of the possible difference in emphasis. The *Quinque Vie*, as sometimes expounded, may become little more than a *jeu d'esprit*, a mental jig-saw, whereas we find John Wesley, driven to bay, prepared to reject the intellect altogether: "Religion is the most plain simple thing in the world. So far as you add philosophy to religion, just so far you spoil it."<sup>1</sup>

When we consider such extreme examples of either way of knowledge in isolation it may be easier to realize their essential inter-dependence.

A metaphysical proof of God's existence which was

<sup>1</sup> Wesley, *Works*, IX, 466 (quoted in Sangster, *Path to Perfection*).

incapable of all relation to actual personal experience would, it is evident, remain unconvincing; while no reasonable faith could be maintained on the basis at least professed by Wesley.

Although the contrast between dogma and experience is most usually stressed in the religious field, we find the same difference of emphasis in every phase of our contact with reality, and always there will be the need for fusion.

If we contrast the famous paradox that "genius is merely an infinite capacity for taking pains" with the more usual sentimental view to which creative art appears pure inspiration, unhampered by requirements of technique, we recognize the same false antithesis.

In view of the very general misuse of an appeal to experience it is necessary to emphasize that the distinction we are stressing is not the difference between thinking and feeling, but a difference in two modes of knowing, in both of which thought and feeling can be involved.

The paramount importance of the element of "immediacy" in even the most speculative knowledge is emphasized by M. Maritain in his *Preface to Metaphysics*.

"The intuition of being is also the intuition of its transcendental character and analogical value. It is not enough to say 'being'. We must have the intuition, the intellectual perception of the inexhaustible and incomprehensible reality thus manifested as the subject of this perception. *It is this intuition that makes the metaphysician.*

" . . . this intuition of which I am speaking does not

necessarily present the appearance of a mystical grace. But it is always, so to speak, a gift bestowed upon the intellect, and beyond question it is in one form or another *indispensable to every metaphysician.*"

There could be very little danger in the citadel of speculation of an over-valuation of intuition, but in a succeeding passage we find an insistence on the need for rhythm and interplay between the two exemplar types of knowledge which would apply profoundly in other fields.

"It is however important to observe that the intuition (of which I was speaking just now) and the analysis (with which I am at present concerned) should accompany each other. Were we content with the intuition without the rational analysis we should risk being landed with an intuition unconfirmed by reason, whose rational necessity therefore would not be manifest. Were we content with the analysis, as we are liable to be when we teach philosophy, though the analysis would indeed prove that we must arrive at the intuition of being as the goal of a necessary regress, it would not of itself furnish the intuition."<sup>1</sup>

This initial difference in our mode of knowing will take varying forms according to its medium of expression—speculative or affective, rational or intuitive, discursive or immediate. The essential distinction is the same. In simpler and more homely examples we find it as "theoretic" or "practical".

For either mode of knowledge to be fruitful it must include and presuppose the other; neither achieves its goal in isolation, but the necessary balance between them is precarious, difficult to attain, and full of tension.

<sup>1</sup> Lecture III, pp. 44, 55.

We are constantly being presented with a wholly unreal choice between an arid would-be speculation and an irrational and formless impulse, neither of which can satisfy or inform us.

It is as though, wanting ourselves to see a certain place, we were given only the alternatives of either looking at it on a map, or wandering in its search without directions.

#### IV

#### *Selective Vision*

The right balance and proportion between these complementary ways of knowledge, the speculative and the experimental, is the crucial problem in our apprehension of reality. The difficulty of translation and re-expression, with which we have started our inquiry, is in fact a far more fundamental issue than at first sight it might appear to be. It is not merely a question of adapting a fully apprehended reality to a less adequately adjusted mind, but, still more essentially, of the relation of reality-as-it-is-in-itself to the imperfect apprehension of even the most highly adjusted mind.

There is an immense difference in our individual powers of apprehension, an immense margin of potential development of these powers, but at its maximum development our vision will remain incomplete. We see a part, a fraction of what is there; we see what we are capable of seeing. Truth as we know it with our highest knowledge can never be truth in its entirety but always the truth as received by our individual mind; and one essential factor in true knowledge must be due recogni-

tion of the tension between the apprehension of being as real and to-be-known and our own limited perception.

“Whatever is received in anything, is received in it according to the nature of the recipient.”<sup>1</sup> Being as such is limitless, but is limited by what receives it.

A faulty recognition of this truth may lead to scepticism, to the despair of any valid knowledge, but rightly understood it should not do so, and a philosophy which ignores it would build upon a most unsure foundation. It is true that in a certain sense our own idea of anything may differ from that of any other human being inasmuch as it has become our own, a part of us. Even in the purely physical world around us we are not certain that what we see, however clearly, is what our neighbour sees at the same moment. He forms his image and I mine; but it is no less true, and of far deeper import, that through this flux and multiplicity of limitless personal variation the principles of abstract thought remain unchanging.

What-we-call-a-red-flower may be, in the last resort, uncommunicable, a different image in each individual mind, but it remains that what-I-call-a-red-flower is either there or it is not, it is either what-I-call-red or it is not.

Moreover, although the individual image in each mind may, in itself, be uncommunicable, it is on that account no less the image of a reality outside our minds. It is an objective truth “subjectivized”, but it is not on that account illusion.

The true relation of our individual image to the reality that it reflects may be more clearly understood

<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, Ia, Q.75, A.5.



if we realize how far our vision of anything is at all times selective.

Everything is there, but we see only part. It is not only that the particular image in my individual mind may be unique, as I am individual and unique. Such difference as this, however true, is of no practical importance, and for all practical purposes our images of quite simple things such as a flower or colour can be assumed to be alike. But beyond this ontological uniqueness there is a constant process of selection in what we choose to see; and this becomes apparent as what we consider is itself more complex, whether it be a concrete visible object or an idea regarded by the mind.

I see not a red flower but a man walking: the ideas which the walking man arouses in my mind, and the minds of those around me, will vary according to our several points of view, our interests, our deliberate choice. We all see the man walking; we agree that a real man is there and that he walks. On the first level of perception the difference in our individual images may be no greater than it was in the case of the red flower, but a man walking is a complex image in which there is already scope for choice. We shall notice different points about him, his physique, his expression, his clothes, his social status, his movement; we regard him according to our personal trend of mind, our view of life, our scale of values.

Yet it will none the less be true that in so far as each of our different selected aspects is, within its acknowledged limits, truly seen, each will be complementary, not conflicting, parts of a whole, and not contradiction.

Before going further in abstract discussion let us then

see how this selective process operates in a more complex case; let us imagine, for example, the scene of a concert in the Albert Hall.

The orchestra is playing, we may suppose, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; the auditorium is crowded; seats on the floor of the hall have been removed to make more standing room; circles and balcony are full; it is a hot summer evening; the conductor is raising his arms to begin the first bars of the second movement. How are we to describe the scene most truly? How, in the first instance, shall we *see* it?

There are, if once we begin to consider, almost countless alternative aspects from which the scene may be regarded, both horizontally and vertically. There is to begin with, an enormous range of possible selection, on the most superficial level, of first impressions.

For example: if we empty our minds of preconceived ideas, of all mental association, we see a mass of shapes and colours before us. There is a particular shade of bluish green which seems to repeat itself almost rhythmically as we look round the vast expanse of the Hall (rationally this may be explained by the fact that a certain shade in this year's fashions happens to tone in a peculiar way with the paint decorating the Albert Hall). There and there and there again, as our eye travels from balcony to circle, it lights upon the recurrent patch of green standing out light and clear against the confused blending of darker colours; and here is a dark red, and there a brown, and shadows cut across the intermingling colours. Circle after circle of light and shadow, of light bluish green and indeterminate brown, a pattern of colour and shape, an aesthe-

tic whole, a rhythm. We may like it or dislike it, we may have no reaction at all towards it, but we *see* it all in these terms only, unrationalized, unassociative, a visual pattern.

Then we may look again at the same scene with the eyes of a box office manager; each circle of light and shades at which he looks takes on a specific associative value as so many "takings"—half-guinea seats, seven-and-sixpenny seats, five shilling seats and so on, a good house, or not so good as the case may be; too large a proportion of cheap seats, perhaps too much space has been reserved for standing. The box office manager will not see at all the patches of bluish green we noticed, he looks at them with blind unseeing eyes. He is quite unaware of the pattern before him, but every row and circle that he looks at is differentiated by its money value. He looks for that and that is what he sees.

We look again as students of sociology and we see a population that cares for music; we notice the social types of which it is composed and the age-groups; we may at some points in our observation overlap with the box office manager, for we shall notice the proportion of cheap seats as compared with the more expensive, but the overlapping is superficial because we approach it from quite a different angle; what we are looking for and what we see is information as to the love of music in Londoners of certain types and classes in the year 1947.

And now we face the scene as music lovers; we hardly see the audience at all, our attention is focused on the orchestra and there we notice an infinity of subtle niceties of movement of which the previous observers

were unconscious. We watch the action of the first violin, and how through his movements the conductor emphasizes a certain passage that is familiar to us; how the wood-wind responds to his directions; or it may be that we are seeing nothing, that the whole visual scene is lost in sound; that we are unaware, not only of the audience, but also of the performers, that we are blinded by sound as we listen.

The material scene before us presents astonishingly varied aspects; yet these are simple visual impressions, colour and shape as they strike the naked eye, movement as we see the object move, individual units we can see as individuals, when we look at them, yet the whole scene is interpenetrated with what we cannot see, yet are aware of, sound.

What is the relation of this music to which we are listening, on account of which we are here, to the material scene of shape and colour? It fills the same space at the same time; it penetrates our minds, it includes all into another whole and yet we are unable to see or touch it.

In such consideration of our sound perceptions we are still on the level of our own unaided sense impressions, what we are able ourselves to see or hear unaided; but if we now penetrate beneath the surface with the vision of the physicist, we shall discover an unsuspected new range of existence, the light-waves of which our colours and shapes consist, the sound-waves we are conscious of as music, the molecules and electrons, the electromagnetic vibrations and the waves of probability of which our entire sensual world consists. And on this plane there is no longer difference between colour and

sound, sight and hearing; the sound waves intersect with the light waves, the music and the colour interweave, no longer separated by our sense organs.

Up to this point our selective perception has operated horizontally, in breadth, as discrimination of perception according to specialization of interest. This first vertical increase in vision has penetrated beneath the outer surface, beneath the superficial divisions of matter, into a unity of radiation where matter as we know it, as the principle of division, is dissipated into a mythology that eludes us. Electrons and molecules and photons, the words indeed will convey little to us, but we recognize that the pale green patch we look at, and the dark brown, are to be seen no longer only as colours in a pattern, nor yet as holders of certain priced tickets nor yet only as individual people, but that these same colour blots are radiation, as we are, and as is the music to which we listen; and the whole hall in which we are is radiant, vibrant, with an activity we had not dreamed of.

Unity is regained at quite a different level.

In such a world of physics we may glimpse a new manner of being, beyond the reach of our immediate senses, yet still, so it would claim, established fact, the reality of which is demonstrated by concrete proof. This world of science, strange and alien as it appears to the unscientific, is still intelligible to the ordinary intelligence aided by scientific instruments. We are still held within a world of matter. But if we penetrate still further below the surface of our first impressions we shall pass below the vibrating systems, beyond the expanding space of radiation. At a far deeper and unmeasured

level we apprehend the waves of thought and feeling with which the same air is full and vibrant.

We must now conceive the space before us as filled with intersecting mental currents; ten thousand different foci giving out emotional and intellectual reactions to the aesthetic impact made upon them; sound waves radiating outward from the orchestra are crossing, in a different dimension, waves of emotional response, of receptivity and obtuseness. There is relation between the music and the aesthetic reaction it elicits in each of the ten thousand receiving minds, but they radiate at different levels.

Here we are beyond the reach of scientific calculation. No instrument can record aesthetic response.<sup>1</sup> Here in the dimension of thought and feeling, of spiritual response to sense impressions, we are escaping, for the first time, from the world of matter, from time and place, into another medium of existence, another standard of reality.

At each stage of our penetration downward, what we reach is less tangible, less communicable, and, at the same time, of greater value. Yet even here, we are still in the created world of sense and spirit.

For the religious mystic all we have seen or touched upon is still but a small section of the truth, all this is still within the order of nature, a deeper vision of natural things; for him, as far beyond the depth of radiation, beyond the intangible limit of aesthetic ecstasy, is still the order of grace, the supernatural, the truth of which transcends all partial truth, includes

<sup>1</sup> Although its external symptoms may be recorded these are but incidental and inessential.

and permeates and transforms the material things he sees and touches, the intellectual mysteries of science, the utmost limit of unaided thought. All that he looks upon or hears or thinks of is, as it were, transmuted and divinized. He, too, will see the patches of light and colour, he, too, will hear the music, but he himself lives in another medium; he is surrounded by ten thousand souls, immortal, holy, sons of God. These patches of colour, these holders of priced tickets, are for him fellow members of Christ's Mystical Body, created and redeemed and loved by God, made one with Him in grace, incorporated in the creative love of all existence; or they are sinners, lost and to be saved, sheep to be sought and found; they are his brothers, and all, redeemed or lost, are of inestimable potential value. In the same way that we have conceived the waves of music, filling and transmuting empty space, as being where what we see is, at the same moment—the dialectic of another medium that cuts across the visual scene of colour and of shape, in the same place, exactly at the same moment, a conflict that is resolved in harmony—so may we now conceive of supernatural grace as an existence of quite another dimension, interwoven, intersecting, transforming what we look at, what we think of, what we are.

The multiplicity in such a vista bewilders the imagination, yet even so the picture we have sketched is fragmentary; the individual views we have suggested are taken at random as illustrating certain types of mind out of a crowd of perhaps ten thousand. In fact each individual mind in that assembly would have received a separate impression, in some way differing

from all the others, though each would, from its unique angle, receive its imprint from the one objective external scene; nor do we, even so, exhaust the sum of possible impressions, perceivable by other minds not present. We have indeed no guide, no means of calculating the infinity of the still unperceived; yet two conclusions of importance emerge from even such an attempt as this at multiple seeing.

In the first place we must realize that these individual impressions do not in any essential sense conflict. Seen in a true relation to each other and to the whole, each in its own formality may be true, though it is only one fraction of the truth, needing an almost endless reinforcement and counterbalance from other angles if any adequate conception of the whole is to be gained. All are like facets of a crystal reflecting light from different angles, but the light they are reflecting is one light. The Albert Hall is there, and the orchestra and the music, however partially each apprehends it.

The second point of equal importance is that, although each individual apprehension may add in some degree to the true picture, the contributions will be of different value.

The different perceptions will complete each other only if they are seen in right relation, and right relation implies a right order, a hierarchical order of value.

I have a right to my particular vision, so long as I recognize it for what it is, partial and incomplete; so long as I do not claim for it either an exclusive validity or, what is far more insidious and tempting, an equal value with what is in fact higher.

The assessment of human beings by their financial



status may be a practical necessity for the box office manager; it does add one ingredient of knowledge to the sum of our knowledge of them, but it is an addition of small importance. If the box office manager were to claim that his contribution to the general picture were all we need to know, or that it were of equal value with that of the mystic, that would be false.

That different statements in regard to the same thing may all be true at the same time is obvious; the apple may be round and hard and red, but these are truths of the same kind at the same level, seen as it were, by the same seer; it is only when we regard the same thing from different levels that the significance of its multiplicity emerges.

We may say that Mary Irene, the city typist, is a patch of green colour, that she is a two-and-sixpenny seat holder, that she is a middle-class-lover-of-music, that she is the sergeant's ideal woman, that she is a swarm of molecules, that she is an immortal soul redeemed by Christ. All these statements may be true, but they are not of equal value, either in the quality of the truth conveyed or as to how much it tells us.

There is a further point: none of the first four statements implies the others, they are optional, on the same level; yet each implies the necessity of at least one of the final three. There is difference of quality between the idea that Mary Irene is a patch of colour and that she is a nucleus of electrons, although if she is the first she must be the second. There is difference not only of quality but of kind between the idea that she is a two-and-sixpenny seat holder and that she is an immortal soul—though again the first statement implies the

second. The first four statements concern external facts, they exercise our minds along the surface, horizontally; the last three draw our vision vertically downward, below immediate appearance to a perception of the hidden nature of things.

The difference between these three non-visual perceptions is in itself incalculably great. The difference that divides the order of grace from even the highest natural spiritual being is greater than that between the highest and lowest created good<sup>1</sup> and again between the world of natural spirit and material cosmic radiation, however intangible to our unaided senses, the difference is vast and fundamental.

The reality of the natural world of spirit is acknowledged in some form or other by the majority of human beings, though its explanation and value are very variously assessed. The materialist view of human nature, which would explain all thought and feeling as merely a mechanical reaction from a complicated mechanism, need not detain us; such simplification explains nothing. The existence and nature of thought and intuition, of the higher emotions, religious, aesthetic, even personal, seem to present us with a half-way house, a no-man's-land between the material world, whose real existence is alone universally accepted, and the supernatural world, the reality of which, if once conceded, transcends material reality by so much that many are afraid to contemplate it.

For an inquiry such as ours the natural spiritual world is of first importance; it is the medium in which the process of an increasing vision in depth takes place

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 189.

most definitely, in which we first begin to apprehend a reality behind appearance; yet to define its frontiers is difficult; from the instinctive pleasure at colour or sound to the ecstasy of the creative artist; from the first stirrings of a moral sense to the developed ethic of the Stoic; the border line at each limit is undefined between a higher and a lower existence; we can but keep distinctly in our minds the difference which in fact divides them as a most vital example of the reality behind appearance.

In Mary Irene it is probable that both emotion and thought are embryonic; she likes music, that is why she is here; it gives her a nice feeling somehow she always thinks, but she does not understand it at all, nor listen much. Her thoughts are largely engaged as she sits there on wholly other and inferior subjects; her new green dress and whether it really suits her; whether the sergeant who is looking at her from three seats off means business; why the bank clerk George sitting next to her takes no notice; whether she ought to get a hat to match:—such thoughts and such emotions are, it seems, of very little spiritual value, yet they are of the same texture as George's thoughts, entranced by Beethoven, oblivious of his surroundings, uplifted, regenerated by music. They are of the same texture as the conductor's to whom each note, each cadence as it rises is the supreme reality of the moment, to whom, while he conducts, and so interprets, the entire outer world has ceased to exist.

In the world of the spirit, apart from grace, there is indeed a difference of degree and quality so extreme that we are often tempted to subdivide it into the semi-

human and wholly human, or into the merely human and the superhuman, yet just because of this difference in value it is especially necessary to recognize its reality as a whole—the *reality* of the non-material as distinct from its potential value.

We shall consider at a later stage the higher expression of this natural world of the spirit, in particular the poetic or artistic. Here it must be enough to recognize its existence as distinct both from the highest and least material forms of matter—as exemplified in cosmic radiation—and, equally, from the world of supernatural, the supreme reality of the mystic.

Just as the waves of thought and feeling, if we envisage them for the moment so, pass and repass in the same space and time as waves of light and sound without collision or impact, in a different dimension, so must we try to envisage the radiation of supernatural grace, through waves of light and sound, through waves of thought and feeling, integral to the entire world of creation, yet utterly distinct and separate from it.

## V

### *Conscious Choice*

So far we have considered only differences of individual perception, which in right order are complementary parts of a whole, but here, as always, there will be a point at which the partial individual visions are fundamentally at variance, no longer, however deeply understood, component parts, but mutually incompatible and conflicting.

Let us for a moment reverse the angle from which we

look upon our concert scene and see these patches of colour, these shapes that move, no longer from the outside, however deeply, but as they see themselves, subjectively, each as the centre of an entire world, a focus of life and emotion and thought and action.

Mary Irene the typist, wearing her new green dress, is to me, as I look, a mere patch of bluish green, but to herself, she seems the only real being present, for whom the entire scene is set. Beside her, a patch of brown is George the bank clerk, lost in his new discovery of Beethoven, projecting his ideas and his reactions across the space of shape and colour between us, through the intersecting waves of sound; he is as unaware as we are of Mary Irene as a centre of life, but he is himself a focus separate, self-centred. Unconscious of himself as social type, as radiation, he is intensely aware of himself as a person, whose life and welfare is of the greatest moment, a centre of interest and vitality.

Now these two personal views are, as they stand, mutually contradictory; in so far as Mary Irene sees herself as focal centre of the scene, her vision must conflict with that of George, since in his picture it is he himself who is the centre; and for each the complex of emotions and reactions which radiate from them are deflected and distorted by their degree of egocentric bias.

Yet even subjective impressions, unreliable as they are as judgements, have reality as thoughts and feelings, as ingredients in the immaterial whole of thought and feeling which we have realized to be radiating through and below the waves of sound and colour.

Moreover, though what they think is false, the fact that they so think, or feel, is true, and if they, as patches of colour or as electrons or as individual personalities, contribute to the different levels of our picture, their actual subjective misconceptions contribute to the truth of our idea as a whole.

Nor is this all; although the egocentric picture of George or Mary is, in the terms in which they frame it, false, there is a sense in which it is more true than the superficial detachment which perceives them both as "nothing but" . . . a single category.

The difference between each individual's self-importance and the value accorded him by others may not be dismissed as fantasy; in the very discrepancy itself there is the germ of a creative truth.

Of our imagined group of onlookers it is, paradoxically, the mystic alone who would, to some extent, confirm Mary Irene's sense of her own importance; but he would see her not only as she is but as she might be.

In a medium beyond their comprehension, he would be able to include her egocentric world in that of George. He would be able to relate as neither contradictory nor absurd the actual insignificance of their lives with the infinite significance they aspire to, although in terms which will mean nothing to them. There are, in fact, not only truth and falsehood but different degrees and kinds of truth, and these, too, our perception must distinguish.

The further we attempt to follow out the implications of this limitless complexity the more clearly we must recognize our inability to conceive it adequately.

We may accept the idea notionally, but finite minds are essentially incapable of a limitless comprehension; they remain inherently selective.

The first reaction to this realization is apt to be a sense of discouragement; if at the most we may comprehend so little, is it worth while to continue further? Is it not more realistic to accept a complete agnosticism?

The answer lies in the character of our selection.

[Since we are by nature incapable of an infinite perception every act of perception on our part is, and is bound to be, selective, but there is very great difference in the nature of that selection.

So far as the selection is fully conscious we are still masters of our own impressions; so long as we realize that we are choosing particular elements in the situation, and that there will be others we have neglected, our partial vision will be valuable; it will, in proportion to its depth and truth, reflect its chosen part reliably, but actually this deliberate selection of what we choose to see is the least factor in the process that is taking place. Quite apart from this conscious purposed choice there is an unconscious process of selection continuously affecting all we see. We are temperamentally and habitually attuned to certain rhythms in the reality around us, of these alone we have become aware, and it is here the danger lies, for there is a constant tendency to deny the action of this non-deliberate selection. We cannot escape from this unconscious process for it is a condition of human existence; the mathematician and the logician are themselves as much affected by it as the most temperamental artist, and it would be difficult to exaggerate its far-reaching effect on all our judge-

ments and on our beliefs. It is in this that we find the explanation of the bewildering difference of opinion among men of intelligence and good will.

The evils which we associate with a subjective view of things (the form in which partial vision is most obvious) are all, if we examine them more closely, results of an unconscious, unacknowledged selection. In such a case we are at the mercy of our own unrecognized mental bias and there is no limit to the possibilities of illusion; but in such a situation the fault lies not in the fact of the selective process but in a failure to recognize and control it.

To recognize the influence of unconscious selection and accept it as a necessary element in our perception of reality is not to fall a victim to subjectivism, it is in fact the truest realism; it is to recognize and accept what truly *is* as distinct from our conception of what *ought to be*. Failure to appreciate this distinction is at the root of most misunderstanding.

We have stressed the importance of distinguishing what is from our idea of what ought to be as an essential first step in apprehension of reality, but this does not mean that we must rest there.

There is a sense in which to know what is must be the end and goal of all our search, but this does not imply acceptance of remedial imperfection in the means by which we reach our end.

Our earthly vision will remain selective, partial, however we may endeavour to extend it, but there is an immense difference between its fullest potential development and the degree of imperfection which we are apt to look upon as normal.



The question then becomes, How far, and in what way, are we to set about improving it?

There are two definite stages to be considered; the first concerns the principle of selection, the second the actual technique of seeing.

Let us consider the first question first.

We have seen that there is a principle of choice, whether it be deliberate or unconscious, in all perception; in so far as the choice we are making is unconscious we shall be at the mercy of every irrational desire or fear; if we are unaware that we are choosing we can have no control over our choice.

In order to improve our vision, then, the first step is to bring to consciousness, and therefore under our own mastery, our hitherto unconscious motives of choice. We must see on what basis our present actual selection is taking place, what kind of things, what elements in a given situation, do we now tend to pick out and notice from among the numberless alternatives.

We shall never quite complete this operation; there will always be some movement of unrecognized selection depending on our individual circumstances and temperamental sensitivity, but the more we are able to do it the better; it is the first step to a clearer and profounder vision.

But when this recognition has been achieved, so far as it is in our power to achieve it, we have then got to make our conscious choice; since it is impossible to see the whole before us, what part, what aspect, shall we choose to see? This is the supreme decision on which all further growth in vision depends. In what direction and towards what end are we anxious to improve our

vision? This question calls for deeper consideration, and here again we shall find a divergence as to the kind of thing we want to see.

It is possible to base our choice on purely quantitative considerations, to see as much as we can, in extension, horizontally, but this is in fact to give up once more our power of choice since a true power of choosing implies some principle of discrimination; to prefer this rather than that involves distinction of value, a higher and lower, as distinct from merely more or less. This is a point of very great importance for we shall find an analogous division in almost every question to be considered, the choice between quality and quantity, mass and value.

The usual objection to experiential knowledge arises, as we have seen, from the tendency to suppose it an escape from intellectual effort; in the present connection the equivalent mistake is to confuse an indiscriminate desire for more with the intellectual discrimination and rational exercise of will demanded by a choice according to value.

The conscious choice we ask for should, moreover, be distinguished from a vague subjective preference; "this appeals to me more than that, I don't know why", is an insufficient ground for selection.

To be constructive, then, our choice must be not only conscious but based on principle; it must recognize not only a difference in value but an objective order of value, the principle of hierarchy.

Since reality is no haphazard amalgam of indifferent fragmentary impressions, but there is order not only in the relation of different aspects to each other, and parts

to whole, but also in varying degrees of truth and kinds of truth; our vision, to achieve its fullest measure, must become not less but more selective; less at the mercy of casual, heterogeneous impressions, more and more consciously discriminative.

VI

*Vertical and Horizontal*

The question of conscious selection in our vision, and of the principle on which to base it, has raised far reaching issues.

What is the real object of our knowledge?

What is it that we really want to know?

We began our inquiry with questions about the nature of reality—What is goodness? What is beauty? What is truth?—and have asserted as a starting-point that all men, whether they recognize it or not, are ultimately seeking knowledge of God; but it must be admitted that on the surface level it would not seem so.

If the attitude of the "plain man" were to be taken at its face value he would appear to take little interest in these questions. If supply does indicate demand, as is usually alleged, the kind of knowledge generally offered should throw light on what is wanted.

From such a point of view the station bookstall, the Readers' Queries in a Sunday paper, or the more instructional cinema films should give us valuable information:

How to construct a wireless set.

How to tell aircraft at a glance.

How to make rabbits pay.

How to increase your personality.

How to increase your business profits.

If this method of inquiry is reliable it seems to show a considerable demand for knowledge on the part of the man in the street, but it suggests with even greater force that the kind of knowledge he desires is wholly different from that with which we are concerned, which we are, moreover, still maintaining to be really desired by everybody.

If this assertion can be justified, this in itself has important implications; it implies the recognition of a distinction between appearance and reality, the possibility of opposition between a superficial misleading appearance and an underlying reality.

The further implications of this admission are far-reaching, affecting ultimately our whole conception of spirit and matter and their relation, but there are many intermediate stages in which right understanding of the relation between surface knowledge and knowledge in depth, the horizontal and the vertical, may save us from the more usual misapprehensions.

In the particular case before us a definite antithesis is suggested between an appearance which will prove to be false and a reality that it obscures. The two ideas are assumed to be really incompatible in their nature.

"If this is true then that is false" is, as we have already admitted, the only response to a real contradiction, but we shall find the further we penetrate in the search for ultimate truth that for one case of real contradiction there will be ten or perhaps twenty in which a still deeper truth absorbs and fuses what on the surface had appeared contradiction.

One of the commonest forms, in fact, in which we meet this contrast between appearance and reality will be precisely this between an apparent surface contradiction and a real underlying unity. This principle of synthesis beneath apparent conflict becomes indeed increasingly important as we go deeper in our perception until there comes a point at which we see that it is through, and only through, the synthesis of apparent opposites that we may apprehend what really *is*, the mystery at the heart of every truth.

To distinguish, then, true contradiction from the apparent is perhaps the most difficult of all the tasks by which our critical judgement will be tested; it demands from us not only a subtlety of perception but an intellectual and emotional effort which we are very often unwilling to make. There is a perpetual temptation to avoid the required effort by bringing all on to the surface level and taking refuge from reality in appearance.

In later chapters we shall consider other examples of this impulse to over-simplify; here there is one further point to note.

This escape from reality into appearance is in some form or other the source of every error; in the particular form before us, refuge from the vertical in the horizontal, it involves a refusal to discriminate between the different degrees of truth implicit in an objective order of value. It is in fact the substitution of an illusory equality for the true hierarchy of value. To see as alternative what is partial is to mistake the part for the whole, the superficial rationalism for which mystery must be opposed to reason.

The following passage from M. Maritain's *Preface to Metaphysics* makes it clear that even in the citadel of pure reason there is the same duality of direction, an analogous relation between the vertical and the horizontal:

"Every scientific question presents a double aspect, the one a *mystery*, the other a problem.

"An intelligible mystery is not a contradiction in terms. On the contrary it is the most exact description of reality. Mystery is not the implacable adversary of understanding . . . A philosophy unaware of mystery would not be a philosophy.

" . . . Where the problem aspect prevails, one solution follows another; where one ends the other begins. There is a rectilinear progress of successive mental views of ideal perspectives, of different ways of conceptualising the object. And if one solution is incomplete, as is always the case, it is *replaced* by its successor. It is as when the landscape changes and scene succeeds to scene as the traveller proceeds on his way. Similarly the mind is on the move. Progress of this kind is progress by substitution.

"On the other hand, where the mystery aspect prevails the intellect has to penetrate more deeply the *same* object. The mind is stationary, turning around a fixed point. Or rather it pierces further and further into the same depth. This is progress in the same place, progress by *deepening*. Thus the intellect as its habitus grows more intense continues, as John of St Thomas puts it, to assault its object, the same object, with increasing force and penetration, *vehementius et profundius*."<sup>1</sup>

In M. Maritain's example the substitution of one truth for another is seen as characteristic of the horizon-

<sup>1</sup> Maritain, *op. cit.*, Lect. I, pp. 4-7.

tal. In pure metaphysics there may be no danger of a parallel vertical process of substitution, but in our ordinary perception there is undoubtedly a danger of an equivalent over-simplification in our vertical progress in depth itself; we find ourselves rejecting as false the first level of reality when once we have penetrated below it, whereas it is not false but secondary.

Ultimately, indeed, appearance should itself be envisaged, not in contrast to, but as included in, the reality beneath it; a reality that is multiple in depth as truly as in extension, in quality as truly as in number.

In the example from which this section started of the kinds of knowledge which are desired by the man-in-the-street we should do wrong to condemn as worthless the information for which he seems to thirst because, according to our judgement, it is an inferior kind of knowledge.

In itself it is better to know how to mend taps or make motor boats or recognize aeroplanes than not to know these things; it is better to know the statistics of income-tax payers or the age-groups of workers in Japan than not to know; it is only in so far as these very secondary kinds of knowledge are put forward out of their true proportion that they become, not merely valueless, but harmful.

According to our principle of judgement knowledge of God, of goodness, truth, or beauty, is intrinsically a higher knowledge than that offered by the station bookstall, but it is not necessarily alternative. We may be experts at constructing boats or making rabbits pay, or quoting statistics, and at the same time attain to higher knowledge, not only in spite of but by means of

these. What is decisive is the end in view; it is in fact the problems of means and ends.

Actually these kinds of popular knowledge seldom claim to be ends in themselves, they are admittedly means to some further end, and in so far as this implies a recognition of their subordinate value this is reassuring, but the essential question still remains: what is the final end to which they are admittedly subordinate?

In most cases we shall find that the subordination so accepted is not of secondary to primary knowledge, of the lower to the higher in the same order of function, but of the knowledge concerned to action. In so far as the process may stop short there it is therefore in itself a reversal of the right order, since ultimately action should serve contemplation.

The examples of the station bookstall do not in fact compete in the same medium with our transcendental questions, but even in the highest forms of knowledge there is, as M. Maritain points out, a real distinction between the vertical and the horizontal, and it is rather in its highest forms that we should consider and compare them.

The accumulation and organization of facts required by scientific research, however advanced, involve a horizontal movement along the surface; the logical argument of active reason may be pursued at almost any height or depth, but in itself its movement is horizontal, and it is rather with these highest forms of a still horizontal progress that there is danger of confusion, the more so since the whole inquiry we are concerned with into the nature of reality is most usually assigned to one or other of these horizontal forms of



thought. Actually there will be at every level the equivalent difference in the further movement of our minds, and it is of first importance to see this difference in its true relation.

The movements in themselves are quite distinct, and the first recognition of this distinction is apt as always to lead to a too drastic separation.

Since the two movements do indeed imply a real difference of direction they are too readily assumed to be incompatible, whereas a deeper perception will reveal them as complementary and co-inhering.

We think of the speculative and intuitive, discursive and immediate, theoretic and practical, as pairs of opposites, mutually antagonistic; and so, in one sense, it is true they are, yet this is itself to judge them on the surface, horizontally; if our apprehension itself goes deeper we attain a kind of dual vision, a power of seeing bifocally, whereby the apparently conflicting is seen as synthesized and one. Yet here again right relation and right order are of the essence of true apprehension; the vertical has priority in value, but it must include the horizontal.

There is, in fact, in ordinary life, in all our activities and interests, a constant interplay and alternation between these movements. Because the horizontal surface movement is less demanding it is usually developed out of its true proportion and right order; what should be the servant becomes the master, but it is significant to notice how far in current speech lip-service at least is accorded to the priority of movement in depth. In practice we do often prefer appearance to reality, shadow to substance, but we seldom admit it.

If we consider the alternatives suggested by deep or wide sympathy, profound or varied experience, deep thought or wide interests, fidelity or versatility, it is obvious that though in actual life the person who is thorough, faithful, and has few but deep friendships, is seldom popular, most people would prefer to be so described and would as definitely resent the contrasting designations.

It is obvious also from these simple examples that the ideal would consist in a maximum in both directions; sympathy that is both deep and wide, thought that is both deep and of wide range, experience that is profound and varied, is very much to be preferred to a depth that may be constricted; but the secondary quality must not profit at the expense of the higher, as it is apt to do.

## VII

### *Quality and Quantity*

Consideration of the order of value involved in vertical perception faces us with the inescapable choice between quality and quantity.

Again we should agree that the ideal would be a maximum of both, the largest quantity of what is best, but in this case, more definitely than in the others we have considered, the alternative offered would seem to be a real one. There is a certain inherent opposition between quality and quantity; we find as a matter of experience that too often quantity can only be increased by a corresponding loss in quality.

Excellence, in whatever form, is in itself an isolating

factor; to excel implies a separation from the majority; those who excel, in whatever respect, are by that excellence, and in exact proportion to its degree, distinguished from the average non-excelling. This is in the nature of excellence and cannot be either denied or ignored but there is scope for a very great divergence in our reaction to this objective fact.

We shall find a constant tendency on the part of the non-excelling mass to undermine the principle of superiority, to destroy or belittle or even to decry the quality in which they are themselves surpassed, whereas those who excel will, for their part, overvalue that merit by which they are themselves distinguished.

This difference in attitude towards excellence finds its practical expression in the hierarchic or equalitarian view of life. The hierarchic standpoint emphasizes the reality and importance of an objective hierarchy of value, the difference, and the importance of the difference, between not only good and bad, but good and better, bad and worse; essentially it differentiates, whereas the equalitarian view will stress what is undifferentiated, in common.

The hierarchic view depends for its validity upon belief in higher authority, higher and essentially other than ourselves, ultimately upon a religious sanction, whereas the equalitarian view relies on the support of others like ourselves, ultimately upon majority judgement.

This difference in final sanction is fundamental, but it is by no means always obvious; it is a truth more real than apparent.

It should be unnecessary to point out that in the

sense in which we use them here the terms hierarchic and equalitarian have no political significance. Political ideology is merely one of the innumerable fields in which these divergent views may be expressed.

When we maintain the hierarchy of value to be an essential pattern in a true order, and the hierarchic view of life to accord with a deeper vision of reality, we do not necessarily condemn a democratic system of government, still less equality before the law.

Democratic government may in itself be either good or bad, it may in given circumstances be preferable or not to oligarchic rule, that is a separate question with which we are not immediately concerned; what is important in the present connection is that political thought and ideology should keep to its true place as secondary, and not lay claim, as it is apt to do, to a false ultimate authority.

According to a right order of values our ideas of truth and goodness should determine our political forms, whereas in a society like our own, so over-concentrated on politics, this order is reversed; it is the political forms themselves which influence and too often distort our conceptions of both truth and goodness.

In a democratic society the principle of majority judgement tends to acquire a disastrous influence in fields entirely outside its competence. "What most people want" may be, up to a point, a useful principle in legislation; it is wholly unreliable as applied to the world of thought.

An abstract truth is in no way affected by what "most people" happen to think about it, nor does virtue gain or lose in value according to popular approval,

yet we commonly meet such assumptions. This is the explicit exaltation of quantity at the expense of quality.

The bias towards a quantitative standard, in a democratic society that is too concentrated on politics, is a factor that we should bear in mind. It is the first and most obvious danger of too much political influence, but there are many secondary effects of this first reversal of right order that are ubiquitous and far-reaching.

One which concerns our present question closely is the tendency to materialize and make concrete abstract and non-material conceptions, so that, for instance, both excellence and equality are envisaged not in themselves as concepts but in concrete and material terms, and the hierarchic principle identified with a capitalist social system in essence utterly at variance with it.

Starting from the political standpoint in this way, excellence is confused with privilege, with which in actual life it is in fact often associated; it is important to see this association in its true perspective. The privilege involved is of two kinds; in the first place to excel in anything implies a privileged position in that regard. The expert violinist is in a position of privilege, as regards the playing of the violin, in relation to those who cannot play it. "One who knows" or "one who can" is in a position of privilege towards the ignorant or incompetent; it is so and it cannot be otherwise.

In this respect privilege is intrinsic to excellence, and it is natural and right that it should be so, but the difficulty arises in those cases where the excellence in question can be seen as the result of, rather than the reason for, privilege.

"He plays the violin and I do not, not from an innate

superiority but because he has been taught and I have not", and there is usually the implication that "he could afford lessons and I could not". The whole situation reduced to economics, translated as it were into a financial medium.

It is important to recognize how far this element of apparent injustice does in fact affect many forms of excellence; St Thomas and Aristotle both take for granted that the supreme goal of speculative knowledge can only be attained by men of leisure; and it is obvious that in all directions the attainment of a given excellence is hampered by external conditions and limitations. The situation can in part be met by material readjustment, by the deliberate extension of external opportunity, and in so far as this will meet the case it is admitted by the most equalitarian reformer that the "acquirable excellence" is good. So long in fact as the good in question is open to all, its value may be acknowledged; but the real difficulty lies deeper; when every external barrier is removed, when every remediable injustice has been righted, there will remain an intractable difference in the quality of human beings, and this challenges a sense of justice that is equalitarian in essence.

"Why should I, who have taken so much trouble, fail to produce the masterpiece he produces?" or even, "Why should I, who want so much to be good, fail to behave as admirably as he does?" and so on through the vast range of potential success and failure. The greater the equality of opportunity, the more obvious is the intrinsic difference in quality.

Although we all take violin lessons, we shall not all become great violinists. There are two alternative re-

actions to this situation, and in this case the choice is truly between two incompatible solutions.

The first, and unfortunately the most usual, is to take refuge from the tension by denial of real value to the pre-eminence we lack, and so minimize the difference between the standard we fail to attain and our actual mediocrity.

The difference between good and evil, truth and error, becomes according to this method merely a difference in personal preference; there is no objective difference between the heroic and the mean; "one kind of action suits you, another me, let us be satisfied to differ."

This attitude of mind is closely connected with the various forms of subjectivism we have already considered, it is insidious and dangerous, sapping the whole conception of true value, destroying the true glory of excellence.

The alternative solution lies in the deepening of our vision, a more spiritual conception both of equality and of excellence. This deeper vision will include an intensified perception of the true hierarchy of value implicit in a theocentric view of life, and in relation to, and belonging to it the ultimate spiritual equality of the supernatural end offered to all men.

The Christian view of life in fact expresses at the same time, and in the same vision, the extreme of hierarchic order in which all value is in relation to God, and at the same time, in the same vision, supreme equality in the one thing needful, potential sharing in the life of God; the Son of God has died for all men, and all are called to be holy.

The average Christian may appear to doubt the

application of this call to him, he may ignore the equality offered to him, as only to be won at too great cost, but in so far as he remains a Christian he cannot deny either the reality or the importance of what he knows divides him from the saint.

There may be difference of opinion as to the quality of excellence in any particular case; what is fundamental is not agreement as to the particular example, but as to the absolute importance of excellence in itself, as a reality. *There is* a difference between good and bad, *there is* a difference between good and better, bad and worse, and these differences matter. If they do not matter, then nothing matters and we had better abandon our inquiry. We must then assume agreement here.

Habitual trends of thought reveal themselves in current speech; it is a matter of experience that quantity is most easily increased by dilution and it is significant to note how readily such dilution is acclaimed as sacrifice.

True sacrifice implies indeed the giving up of something good in itself for the sake of an acknowledged better; this may involve an interim dilution, the lessening of an original excellence as a means towards a higher good which will surpass it, but the end in view is all-important. If the sacrifice is to be a true one, the end for which the first good is lessened must be truly higher, whereas in practice we find the process is too often reversed, the higher good is sacrificed to the lower, the real to the apparent; this is so always when quality is sacrificed to quantity.

It is enlightening to consider the different mental attitudes implied by the three alternative relations, sacrifice, dilution, and compromise.



Sacrifice assumes the reality of hierarchic vision and a belief in objective values, dilution also assumes an order of value, but is the first step towards its liquidation, involving as it does essentially the reduction of excellence to mediocrity; compromise we may see as the third phase, in which higher and lower no longer count, but the two goods involved are seen on the same level, a matter of accidental preference, the vertical reduced to horizontal.

The tendency to dilution or compromise is connected with the attitude of indifference we have noted, the denial of qualitative difference as in itself of any real importance. We give up more readily a currency that is already debased.

If what is now abandoned or diluted represents merely a subjective fancy, the "what-appeals-to-me" in contrast to "what-appeals-to-you", we need have little compunction at its further dilution into some form of agreed solution; in fact, in this case, we should sacrifice the lesser good of individual fancy for the greater good of concord, but the matter is less simply dealt with if we are dealing with ultimate truth and falsehood; no surface compromise can help us here, only a deeper penetration into the real nature of what is; a return into the vertical from the horizontal.

## VIII

### *Activity and Passivity*

The question of selective vision, in fact, involves us in many deep and controversial issues not at first sight connected with it. Not only does it raise, from the out-

set, the relation between individual perception and objective reality, speculative and experimental knowledge, but it has led us to the distinction between the hierarchic and equalitarian points of view, and now, as we are about to see, to that between activity and passivity.

We have recognized two separate needs in the development of our powers of seeing. Not only must we develop to the full our powers of conscious choice, but, having done so, there is still the actual process of vision to be improved. In the first part of our problem we have been concerned primarily with the necessity for activity, the active use of intellect in judging and will in choosing what is best, in the second part we are rather concerned with the results of that activity, the means by which, once having made our choice, we are enabled to receive its fruits.

We are so generally accustomed to think of seeing as in itself a wholly active process that it may seem a paradox to suggest that the first requisite for improvement in the actual technique of seeing is to be looked for in an increased receptivity, yet it is this that must be realized.

Ultimately, as in all our other alternatives, we shall find that both elements are needed and that to depend on either without the other leads to distortion, but in this particular connection, in distinction from the activity of selection, the passivity of experience must be stressed.

We think most usually of the mind as active, as attacking an impassive object, as in the passage from M. Maritain, *vehementius et profundius*, or in terms of physical vision we picture the eye as piercing actively the obscurity.

In whatever medium we envisage our relation with the reality around us we tend to see ourselves as active agents, as though masters of the situation.

In some forms of knowledge or of vision we are in fact in action towards a mainly passive object, but it is important to recognize that this is by no means always so, that there can as well be knowledge or vision or feeling in which the expected relation is reversed, in which the mind or eye or heart, in whichever mode we function, is predominantly receptive, attuned to an almost passive reception of the impact of some active impression.<sup>1</sup>

In either case the actual contact between the mind and the external object must be of maximum intensity if we are to attain to deeper vision; the active attack by the mind upon its object must be as active as possible, the passive reception of the impression as passive as possible; what is to be avoided at all costs is, as always, a slackening of tension, mediocrity.

This does not mean concentration on one aspect only to the exclusion of the other; this too easy simplification is, as we have seen in other contexts, merely avoidance of the necessary creative tension; as in the other examples we have already considered, a synthesis is in fact required between the seemingly conflicting aspects; development in both is needed, a deliberate intensification of the apparent clash and dialectic which is involved in any truth in depth.

As in the vertical and horizontal movements so we

<sup>1</sup> The importance of this passive aspect is curiously borne out in the case of physical vision in the new systems of sight training in which great stress is laid upon the need for a more passive acceptance of what we see in contrast to the strain of active looking.

shall find the active and passive moods ultimately interdependent, both in a constant rhythm and interplay of successive and recurrent phases, and also more paradoxically essential, as both simultaneous and co-inherent, each aspect latent and implicit in the other.

The active attack of the mind on truth or knowledge, taking possession of its object, puts it as it were at our disposal, but it remains unabsorbed, unapprehended, only most superficially possessed, unless we are able to experience it in the passive acceptance of what is offered. Experience in fact implies a passive relation to the impact of reality, the reception in depth of the impression. In so far as we want to experience more deeply we must become more passive and receptive, but it is necessary to realize that the actual process of becoming more passive in itself involves an intensified activity; both an increased activity of will, by which we deliberately attune ourselves to the particular desired impression, and also in response to what is apprehended some further phase of active re-expression.

Because the activity involved in the completed process of apprehension is essentially interior it is generally unrecognized by an externalized public opinion, for which activity means concrete output, and the creative passivity of perception is regarded as mere negative inertia, from which it is, in fact, the extreme pole. Nor does the misunderstanding stop short there; not only is passivity condemned through inability to appreciate it, but the supposed activity with which it is, to its detriment, contrasted, is correspondingly misapprehended through the failure to perceive the passive element in it. Activity of any kind, indeed, whether

external or inward, if it is to achieve its own fulfilment must ultimately lead to contemplation, and in its creativity imply it.

Because the full course of our vision, through activity to contemplation, is so seldom in practice unimpeded we find that which is actually failure generally assumed as normal. Active and passive modes of apprehension become unnaturally disassociated, and, as a consequence, disproportioned. Hair-splitting and pedantic agglomeration of facts are taken as the true exercise of reason, false mysticism and emotionalism for the passivity of intuition.

If we examine these examples of false presentation more closely we find that in each case the falsity consists in an arrested rhythm, one phase too sharply separated from its inherent and needed complement. The horizontal ratiocination has failed to deepen into a vertical experience, the vague receptive awareness has omitted the essential constructive dynamism which in each case fulfilment presupposes.

In every completed act of apprehension there will be in fact an analogous rhythm, the perpetual interplay between active and passive, each phase giving rise to and at the same time succeeding the complementary yet distinct aspect.

Moreover, this interaction between active and passive is by no means confined to intellectual vision, to the quasi-visual perception which we have so far considered. There is the same ebb and flow, receiving and giving out, in all our being, in all our contact with reality; whether we like it or dislike it, whether we recognize it or ignore it, this constant interplay between action and

passivity is operating in and on us, and in the working of selective vision it is of first importance that we should recognize its operation and, in so far as may be, regulate it.

The principle of selective perception involved in any specified technique is universally acknowledged; technical skill indeed largely depends upon such acquired selectivity; it is a matter of common knowledge that the trained eye perceives what it is trained to see, the trained ear will hear the sound for which it listens, to both of which the untrained eye and ear are blind and deaf.

Go for a walk with a lover of birds; at every step he sees and hears signs of the life to which he is attuned; he hears the notes of one particular throat through the general chorus of birds singing; he sees the flash of feathers in the trees quite imperceptible to his companion. He does not imagine these things. He truly hears and sees them; the birds that he is seeking for are there, though we, with less selective faculties, have missed them in the undifferentiated blur of sights and sounds.

Walk through the same wood with a botanist; he is as impervious as we are ourselves to the revealing note of the Great Tit, to the brown flicker of its wing, but he will see the almost hidden foliage of the orchis for which he is looking, which we, again untrained, have failed to see. In each technique and craft there will be a corresponding technique of perception. The dressmaker as she crosses the room observes the cut of every dress she passes, the sergeant major walking through the park notices, as by second nature, the insignia of every service

man who comes in sight, while we poor blind and deaf and undeveloped notice nothing and are but vaguely conscious of the wood in Springtime with birds singing, or people in their best dresses at a party, or a great many soldiers in the park. I have enjoyed the walking in the wood, the evening party, and the Sunday park, but I have enjoyed them unintelligently; I have missed half, or more than half, the content of the experiences through which I passed. I am the poorer in so far as I am, indiscriminately, non-receptive. The more we can develop our latent powers the better, but the real value of such observation will depend wholly upon the further use to be made of it. As with the horizontal accumulation of facts, so with the superficial sense activity, the first horizontal movement must be regarded as a preliminary only to some further stage of apprehension; it is essentially and always a means to an end, not an end in itself, material for some further creative action, not in itself creative.

The further apprehension which is called for may be, at first, still mainly horizontal and active, the organization of our observations and the logical deductions from them, as in Natural Science and Economics, but, as all surface knowledge must, to be fruitful, change to knowledge in depth, a deeper penetration of what is known, so if the course of vision is to achieve its end must the activity of observation lead on to a more receptive insight; having collected on the surface quantitatively it must develop in some form or other into a qualitative perception, and this involves a change both of direction and of mood; not only a change of direction from horizontal to vertical, but also a change of mood

from active to passive; from observation to experience.

It is true that the first stage in deeper vision may often take the form of active penetration, a deeper positive attack on the nature of the thing being considered, but if the process continues unimpeded, this in its turn must become more receptive, the active penetration of the thing, however deep, must lead on to an experience of its nature which is essentially passive.

"We are confronted with objects, and as we confront them, the diverse realities made known by our senses or by the several sciences, we receive at a given moment as it were the revelation of an intelligible mystery concealed in them. Nor is this revelation, this species of intellectual shock, confined to metaphysicians. It is sometimes given to those who are not metaphysicians. There is a kind of sudden intuition which a soul may receive of her own existence or being, of 'being' embodied in all things whatsoever, however lowly. It may even happen that to a particular soul this intellectual perception presents the semblance of a mystical grace.

"... moreover it is as true to say that this intuition produces itself through the medium of the vital action of our intellect, I mean as vitally receptive and contemplative, as to say we produce it. It is difficult, inasmuch as it is difficult to arrive at the degree of mental purification at which this act is produced in us, at which we become sufficiently disengaged, sufficiently empty, to hear what all things whisper, and to listen instead of composing answers."<sup>1</sup>

And again:

"Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty, a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet

<sup>1</sup> Maritain, *Op. Cit.*, Lecture III, pp. 47, 48.



sublimely pure and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry. What is best in mathematics deserves not merely to be learnt as a task, but to be assimilated as a part of daily thought, and brought again and again before the mind with ever renewed encouragement.

"... the discovery that all mathematics follows inevitably from a small collection of fundamental laws is one which immeasurably enhances the intellectual beauty of the whole; to those who have been oppressed by the fragmentary and incomplete nature of most existing chains of deduction this discovery comes with all the overwhelming force of a revelation . . ."¹

This change of mood from action to contemplation is, as we should expect, most explicit in the higher forms of knowledge, but it is in fact implicit in all forms of fulfilled activity.²

The ornithologist, the botanist, even the sergant, must each in his degree, in his own medium, relinquish

¹ Bertrand Russell, *The Study of Mathematics: Philosophical Essays*, 1910.

² From a slightly different angle this essential element of contemplation in our everyday existence is emphasized by Père Louismet:

"In itself, contemplation is natural to man and forms an integral part of his rational life; there is an element of contemplation at the heart of every enjoyment that is in accordance with 'right reason' . . . every man during some part of every day (provided that he enjoys the use of his sensible and intellectual faculties) gives himself, in a certain measure, to contemplation."

(*La contemplation chrétienne*, pp. 23-45.)

at some point, sooner or later, his horizontal cataloguing progress, his exercise of external observation, and change the character of his activity; having collected his material he must assimilate and experience it. If his knowledge is to reach fulfilment it must deepen into some apprehension of its relation to the universe, from multiplicity to unity. If his activity is to become fruitful it must in some measure become contemplative.

This apprehension will involve some measure, at least, of a more passive and receptive attitude towards the material he is concerned with. The specialist has by his active observation set in motion a train of succeeding and co-inhering phases of activity and passive reception; if he refuses, as he too often does, to submit to the experience his initial action has evoked, his apprehension will have been abortive, truncated; his goalless journey has become an antic; the means, an end.

In these examples of a trained technical selection the acquired perception is in the first instance horizontal and external, an increase in surface observation, and in so far as this is truly so, we have to stress the importance of the ensuing change in mood and depth, but even such a conception of a time-sequence is, as it stands, an over-simplification, for it is also true and to be noted that even these seemingly active observations must contain, in themselves, an element of passive receptivity, if they are to yield the further development.

The deliberate selection by which eye or ear becomes attuned to its particular desired object, in fact, implies and presupposes the shutting out of distracting impressions to clear the way for one desired impact which is

the characteristic preparation for every form of contemplative vision.

The ornithologist and the sergeant, indeed, have alike, by means of an ascetic training, attained a highly specialized receptivity. They have so disciplined their senses that they are able at a given moment to exclude all non-essential impacts from the external world around them and remain selectively receptive to a single chosen sense-impression.

It is only by a clearer initial grasp of the duality inherent in both active and passive phases that we are able either to discriminate between them or to appreciate their true relation.

## IX

### *Receptivity*

It is evident that although both active and passive modes are needed for true vision, it is not a matter of indifference how or in what proportion they are developed. If we are to attain a closer contact with reality we must learn in the first place to recognize more clearly the actual nature of our present contact, and having done this to control and regulate it. We must first see in order to take action, yet that action is in itself but a means to deeper and fuller seeing.

There is undoubtedly a great difference in temperamental receptivity; for some people a receptive attitude of mind is natural and it is with difficulty that they can stir themselves to active perception, while to others activity seems the main reaction to any impact and they find it correspondingly hard to wait and listen, but

it is no less true that in each case the complementary attitude is latent and should, for a right balance, play its part.

The universality of this interplay between activity and passivity throughout life, and its significance, finds expression in many traditional symbolic forms, usually in some way identified with the masculine and feminine principles such as the Yin and Yang of Chinese art, or in the symbolism of Night and Day, or Sun and Moon.<sup>1</sup> It has been recognized in mythology and in art from earliest stages and in all civilizations, but it is insufficiently acknowledged in current life, largely through the general misconception of the true nature of passivity.

Western civilization has for so long been concentrated upon material progress as the one form of true development that our capacity for passivity has become atrophied, and with our capacity our conception of it. To the average Western mind to-day, passivity suggests inertia, deadness, lack of response; indeed our language is so formed that if we attempt to define the passive state, we must do so in terms of negation, of what it is not, whereas passivity, rightly understood, is not merely positive, but dynamic.

We shall consider later in more detail the nature of this passive vision in its highest forms, as expressed in the poet and the religious mystic, but it is integral to our argument that, so far from being peculiar to these

<sup>1</sup> "When *Yang* has reached its greatest strength, the dark power of *Yin* is born within its depths; night begins at midday when *Yang* breaks up and begins to change into *Yin*." (I. Ching: quoted in Jung's *Commentary on the Golden Flower*).

highly developed types, a due element of passivity is required for everybody in order to attain harmonious contact with the reality around them, let alone see or understand it.

The peculiar sensitivity of the artist may be conceded as part of his specialized temperament, and for a far smaller minority the passive states of mystical contemplation may be, at least in theory, recognized, but there is very little realization of this same element of passivity as affecting the lives of ordinary ungifted people.

If we consider for a moment the effect of receptivity or its absence in its practical effect on our behaviour we may begin to recognize its importance.

The particular aspect which emerges most definitely in the field of practical behaviour is that of objectivity in judgement, the degree to which our personal interests, whether desires or fears, affect our vision.

If the true nature and relation of receptivity and action is understood it must be clear that only a receptive state of mind can receive an impartial and unbiased impression, but this conclusion is in direct opposition to the usual association of receptivity with subjectivism. If we have adequately understood the passive element in all true perception it should be evident that the more our personal emotions are involved the more need is there for a truly receptive attitude towards the, perhaps painful, objective truth, but the required passivity of mind can be reached only through an interior exercise of will that is intensely and even painfully active.

The average mind approaches every subject already half made up as to its judgement, emotional bias, desire

or fear, preconceived ready-made convictions, unwillingness to accept disturbing factors . . . a thousand different influences affect the attitude with which it goes to meet the expected impact of new truth, and to an astonishingly large extent it will receive the impression that it was expecting. This means that the impression it receives is by no means objective, but merely, however plausibly disguised, its own already formed idea projected.

In order to reach a truly objective view in questions of behaviour and moral judgement, the same essential process is required as for the development of all other "selective vision"; firstly an active clearing of the ground from obvious distracting influences, and secondly, as the complement of this action, an increasingly receptive waiting for the now unimpeded impact.

What it is important to keep in mind, in this situation as in all others, is once more the co-inherence of a preparatory activity and the ensuing passive reception.

The substitution of activity for receptiveness, which in fact means the turning outward, the materializing of activity, is so general and so far reaching in its effects, in every section of our life and thought, that it is difficult to convey its import; it has become so much a matter of course to most people in the West to-day that it is difficult to convince them that any other approach to life is practicable. We are so accustomed to project ourselves, our own ideas, above all our own wishes on every circumstance and situation that our faculty of perception has become atrophied and ineffective. We

are like deaf people who keep talking to conceal their own infirmity.

Against this general indictment of modern thought as too actively subjective, the value placed on "science" may be urged, since scientific knowledge or research implies the extreme of objectivity. This objection will not stand the test of practical experience; it is true that scientific knowledge to be of value should be objective, but so should all research and all knowledge. The great inquirers in all fields of thought do, in proportion to their greatness, to the creative quality of their vision, in fact attain to non-subjective truth, and in the measure that they do so will they in fact have become contemplative, but even a slight personal acquaintance with the average scientific mind (so called) shows it to be in fact no more objective, no less subject to fear and wishful thinking, than any other average mind. It is misleading to take such claims as these at their face value.

The degree to which this projection of ourselves is almost constantly impeding the impact of a true impression can be most devastatingly realized in just those fields of thought and action where objectivity is the most needed. Lip service may indeed be rendered to a supposed supremacy of science, but when we come to examine its implications we find that here, as in all other forms of thought, truth is envisaged as the servant of man and not the master. It is applied science, servile science, that is desired.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The address of the present Prime Minister, Mr Attlee, to the Royal Society provides a striking example of this attitude of mind (December 1945).

In precisely the same spirit even religion may be encouraged if it is thought to be socially useful.

In the first instance we realize this reversal of a right order rather as an intellectual misconception, a theoretic or abstract error of judgement, but here too the vital inter-connection of vision and action, of intellect and will, is all-important, and we shall find, if we look more deeply, that the tendency to a false seeing is in fact conditioned by a false willing.

From the earliest philosophic systems desire and fear have been recognized as the main obstacles to both right seeing and right action, but it is seldom under their own colours that these enemies intervene most dangerously; if we are insufficiently aware our moral principles themselves become the means and the occasion for a further phase of self-delusion.

The average mind, as we have noted, approaches each succeeding situation with its own predetermined mental picture of what it means to find emotionally; the more the individual concerned identifies himself with moral values, the more danger will there be, if he is insufficiently receptive, of his mistaking his own desires and fears for moral principles.

The extent to which this natural tendency is deliberately encouraged in time of war can be an illuminating object lesson, but the same impulse, only less openly, is in some form or other the consequence of any form of positive moral allegiance. In varying ways and varying degrees we are impelled to identify ourselves, our ideas, our wishes with the good we acknowledge, but here the ways divide decisively; how is the identi-



fication to be effected? Are we to acknowledge an objective good to which our personal good must be subjected? This will involve receptivity to, acceptance of, a truth not necessarily agreeable—or shall we take refuge from the dilemma in the more active substitution of our own picture for the unacceptable actual fact? We can remain in our own estimation clearly associated with the good, not by conformity of ourselves to it but by a more determined self-projection, the more active substitution of what we would wish to be for what is. This is by far the most usual solution.

The prevalence of this form of self-deception, especially in regard to our own motives, forms the basis of the new science of analytical psychology. The discoveries of Drs Freud and Adler are almost exclusively concerned with the unearthing of unsuspected motives at variance with a too rigid moral censor. There are no doubt morbid states of mind in which some expert help is needed to discover the true situation, but I suggest that increased attention to our natural powers of passive knowledge would in many cases effect the needed cure without a doctor.

The typical psychological conflict is, as a rule, merely an exaggerated example of a universal problem in our relation to reality. It is the conflict between acceptance and self-assertion in our approach to truth, as to all life.

“Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!” as contrasted with: “What I tell you three times is true!”

St Paul’s analysis of his own condition: “The evil that I would not, that I do; the good that I would do,

that I do not", expresses surely in its completest form the passive acceptance of self-knowledge, yet no one can accuse St Paul of inertia, nor yet question the active ascetic preparation which had prepared the way for his self-knowledge.

The rarity of an objective attitude towards oneself and one's own interests should in itself give us pause. From the earliest beginnings of conscious moral thinking, the admonition: "γινωθι σεαυτον"<sup>1</sup> has been reiterated as the first step towards all deeper knowledge. With different emphasis and from varying angles it forms the basis of almost all religious and moral teaching, yet at the present day it is assumed that only by a quasi-surgical operation can the required detachment be attained, and even so the process should become not only effortless but painless.

The psycho-analysts of standing do what they can to modify this impression; they emphatically stress the pain involved in a successful analysis of our motives, the necessity of accepting a reality that is distasteful before a true self-knowledge can break through; but there is a very great divergence in the way that this necessity can be presented. If moral value can be eliminated and we can see ourselves as simply victims of parental error or neurosis the process of self-knowledge can become rather a source of self-pity than of repentance; it is of course as such more readily accepted, but the ascetic *katharsis* needed for true vision has been evaded.

It becomes easy to admit sinfulness if sin itself has no reality or meaning, but a self-knowledge based on such assumptions will be more hindrance than help since it

<sup>1</sup> "Know thyself."

provides merely a new escape from painful truth. We find indeed on deeper examination that the general opposition to deeper vision is in its essence as much anti-ascetic as anti-contemplative.

## X

*Humility*

The close connection, and indeed inter-action, between the interior activity of self-knowledge and increased vision is most explicitly exemplified in the virtue of humility.

Humility is indeed in itself a crucial issue between the two main attitudes to life, the equalitarian and the hierarchic, and it is enlightening to see how clearly the whole conception of this virtue is bound up both with receptivity, with acceptance, and with an unremitting inward activity.

To the average modern mind the whole idea of humility is distasteful, and not only distasteful but unreal; it suggests an attitude of hypocrisy, of an artificial inferiority-complex which is quite rightly disapproved. This is, I think, an inevitable outcome of the equalitarian view of life, for which others-like-ourselves, our equals, are the standard to which everything must be referred. On such a basis it is obvious that to declare ourselves deliberately inferior to our equals is self-contradictory and absurd; the more the principle of equality has dominated our entire *weltanschauung*, the less can a true humility be conceived.

It is not accidental that for the Christian this controversial virtue should be so fundamental, for it is of the

essence of his position to recognize his own subordination in a hierarchic order. For him humility need not imply any exaggerated profession of inferiority in relation to his actual equals; what it does recognize, on the other hand, is the reality and the importance of what is infinitely above him; we find indeed a direct relation between the intensity with which the supernatural order is realized, the actuality of belief in God, and the sense of our own distance from Him.

"Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!" St Peter's exclamation epitomizes the essential effect of supernatural vision, and we shall find the same essential truth proportionately and consistently expressed by those to whom some approximate perception may have been granted.

It is assumed as a common fact of spiritual life.

"Holy men," says St Gregory, "the higher that they raise themselves, approaching to God, the more clearly do they perceive their own unworthiness, because being encompassed with a purer light, they discover in themselves those defects which before they could not see."<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis in such statements is always on recognition of our position as subordinate and relative, the vertical approach to truth, whether envisaged as in depth or height, and on the passive acceptance of its impact, but the very acceptance in itself involves the intense spiritual activity of the active will to sanctity.

It can be seen from such considerations how closely all the several characteristics of the hierarchic view of

<sup>1</sup> St Gregory, *Morals*, I, 27 (quoted *Sancta Sophia*, p. 318).

life inhere if it is allowed to make its impact on us in its entirety and unresisted, but this is very rarely permitted. By far the greater number of professed Christians are personally little more receptive than the avowed equalitarians who openly reject all revelation; they do not realize the implications of the position that they have accepted.

Humility we may assert to be the touchstone between the two opposing points of view, for real humility necessitates the hierarchic view in all its implications; it is essential to the religious position and at the same time, for the same reasons, incompatible with equalitarian rationalism.

This is the first truth about humility, but there are other related aspects of it which may throw light upon our main inquiry.

In the first place it is obvious that humility, being essentially the acceptance of the truth about oneself, is incompatible with the projection of the ideal-self picture which we have seen to be the prime obstacle in the way of self-knowledge.

Humility is primarily a moral quality, a virtue, but its influence extends far beyond the field of actual ethics. There is a sense in which we can maintain a true humility to be the key to every form of human achievement, in so far as it implies a recognition of what *is*, in our own relation to anything; and we shall find that failure in this virtue arises always from some lack of vision.

We have already seen to what extent all difference of opinion arises from a difference in what we see; in the same way a wrong judgement of ourselves, or of our

own achievements, is always, if we examine it more deeply, due to failure in perception.

Humility itself depends upon the perception of immaterial hierarchic value, a seeing of the unseen, but it is equally true that a right judgement of our actual achievements depends always upon the relation of what we have done to what we might have done, to perfection. It is admittedly very hard indeed to form an adequate judgement of the works of our own brain and hands; as always in questions of human reaction, temperamental differences affect us, but as a general principle we shall find the tendency to self-satisfaction correspond with lack of vision.

We may rightly judge that our achievement has certain merits, that we have to a large extent succeeded in what we tried to do, but it is certain that the higher our aim, the deeper our vision of perfection, the more discrepancy will there be between our vision and its realization.

This truth, as we have seen, is taken for granted in the case of spiritual achievements; the sense of inadequacy, even of sin, in saints is often accounted morbid by those who do not understand their vision of sanctity, but by Christians it is recognized that in the spiritual life progress involves such an increased perception of God's goodness that our own infinitesimal achievement falls into insignificance before it.

"I see clearly enough that I have not yet begun to serve God, though He showers down on me those graces which He gives to many good people. I am a mass of imperfections, except in desire and love, for herein I see that Our Lord has been gracious to me in order that I may please Him in some

measure; I really think that I love Him, but my conduct and the many imperfections I discover in myself make me sad."<sup>1</sup>

The tendency to keep religion separate from life as a whole has tended to prevent the general recognition of this same truth in other fields. Here too a further explanation is to be found in the externalization of all activity.

In every form of mental act there is both tension between the active and passive relation to truth, and the intersecting further tension between an inner and an outward movement.

If through the inner activity of our will we can develop our latent faculties of contemplation we shall become increasingly aware of an infinity beyond our grasp; by our receptive powers we are related to an unattained perfection in essence far transcending the finite powers of our human minds; the contrast between our own limitation and the unlimited perfection which we in some small fraction apprehend is so immediate, so overwhelming, that in proportion to our apprehension we must be humbled. This is the necessary outcome of contemplative vision of any kind.

## XI

### *Self-Knowledge*

In the foregoing pages we have tried to show the duality inherent in our contact with reality; in any penetration beneath the surface we find a polarity, a tension, between two apparently opposed extremes which in deeper vision are found to be, not incompa-

<sup>1</sup> St Teresa, *Life*, xxx, 21.

tible, but co-inherent. What on the surface seemed conflicting proves at a deeper level complementary.

In each case we have so far considered deeper vision has in fact resulted in the synthesis and fusion of the apparent poles of contradiction, in a new unity at a deeper level.

Although this principle of duality finds expression in almost limitless forms and combinations, the pairs of opposites we have so far considered fall into a definite alignment, two dominating trends or attitudes in our relation to the world around us, one predominantly receptive, associated with experiential knowledge, a hierarchic view of life, and dependent on an activity that is internal, the other obviously active with an activity that is external and rational, suggestive of a horizontal movement. These two attitudes clearly correspond to the traditional distinction between the contemplative and the active life.

However fundamentally interdependent, these two main trends are in themselves distinct and one or other will dominate and form our attitude to life and knowledge. The interplay and tension between these two apparent opposites expresses a principle of dialectic inherent in all truth in depth.

As in the cases we have so far considered, so, in whatever form we meet it, it will be necessary to distinguish this creative and dynamic tension from the fundamental contradiction for which it is too readily mistaken.

The reduction of the multiple to the simple, not by synthesis but by elimination, is necessarily an impoverishment, however alluring the short cut may seem. It is,



moreover, important to remember that not only are both elements in the creative tension needed but they are needed in the right relation; an indiscriminate juxtaposition is no substitute for an ordered pattern.

In the duality we are concerned with the contemplative is intrinsically first, and must be recognized as primal if we are to attain to a true vision, whereas in actual life to-day we find not only a general reduction of the complex to the superficial but also a process of flattening and levelling which positively discriminates against the true order of value; not haphazard merely, but anti-contemplative.

At present both modes of perception are as a rule at half tension, undeveloped, but the active has priority, whereas ideally both should be at full tension, but the receptive should be first. Our task then is not only to improve the general quality of our seeing but also to restore a lost order in seeing, and this means to reverse the present order; not only to increase the tension of both modes of perception but also to increase most the passive and receptive.

We are thus back once more at the distinction between what is and what ought to be, and, as we have already realized, one intrinsically implies the other; without true understanding of what is we are unable to improve it, without true apprehension of what ought to be we are unable to understand what is.

The first step towards knowledge of what is is, as we have recognized, self-knowledge, but it is not only as individual souls that we must know ourselves, but also in our relation to society. We are not disembodied spirits but social units affecting, and affected by, our

environment; knowledge of ourselves must then include a true understanding of our circumstances; the influence of our environment upon us and our particular reactions to it.

The pressure of our mental environment is in fact continual.

In the present case the pressure of a democratic society is inevitably equalitarian, it works towards the abolition of all isolating excellence, the reduction to mediocrity of what differentiates from the mass. The pressure of an activist society is at the same time to transpose all immaterial value into terms of external activity, of doing as distinct from being. This influence is exerted in many ways. The obvious direct methods of press and cinema and wireless are probably less dangerous, because so obvious, than the insidious pressure of mass opinion in personal and social contacts. There is, moreover, one special form of influence which is too easily ignored.

We have seen how the objective truth must be adapted to our minds, if we are to possess and understand it, and the reciprocal movement is as essential, by which our individual impression, subjective, unreliable, unconfirmed, must be referred back to some outer tribunal for confirmation before its validity can be accepted.

The impulse to seek this confirmation is in itself a valuable safeguard for the sanity of the individual, but the value of its sanction will depend upon the nature of the tribunal appealed to. On what principle is it selected? What is the nature of its authority?

If we are not sufficiently on our guard we tend to submit our impressions not to a genuinely objective

judgement but to a tribunal of our own creating, merely an extension in some form or other of our own personal views and preferences. This is an especial danger in the equalitarian reference to the judgement of "others like ourselves".

In a society whose external measures are governed by majority opinion there is an inevitable tendency to accept this mass support as final sanction in contrast to the hierarchic dependence on an acknowledged "higher authority", on "one who knows", other than, and superior to, ourselves.

The close connection between the hierarchic view of life and a receptive attitude of mind becomes apparent when we consider it from this point of view, since if it is to be of any value, true receptivity implies the reality of a higher source of knowledge in relation to which we can become receptive, from which we are able to receive the truth.

At present we are in a vicious circle in which an equalitarian materialism is perpetually self-confirmed by reference to its own collective sanction.

What the public wants, or thinks, or judges, is taken, by the members of that public, as an objective and impartial judgement. In such a process there is an ever increasing re-inforcement of the original distortion.

The only way to restore the balance which has been so seriously upset is to arrest its further self-confirmation, to call a halt and pause and wait, and listen, to look inward and know ourselves.

Self-knowledge is essentially reflexive, a looking inward in depth, and seeing, or at least attempting to see, the reality below appearance. Rightly understood

it implies acceptance of what may be unexpected, against our wishes, of what is, as distinguished from what we want to be.

The usual objection to receptive knowledge as unreliable and subjective is, as we have already pointed out, only applicable to its abuses; in the present connection it is evident that a true receptivity can be not merely equally but more objective than the usual forms of active knowledge, since the more truly receptive we become the more accurately will our minds reflect the reality impressed upon them.

Receptivity is in fact true realism.

The following pages are a plea for an increase in our passive knowledge as the first step towards truer vision. But the question of vision cannot in fact be treated in isolation from our whole attitude to life, our *Weltanschauung*, of which it is a part and an expression, and it is more especially in its application to life as a whole that we shall encounter strong resistance, the stronger that it will remain unacknowledged. We must recognize this at the outset.

In the first place we are maintaining a spiritual value as against popular materialism.

In the second place we are implicitly demanding a hierarchic view of life as against the prevailing equalitarianism.

In the third place what we are proposing requires an increased spiritual activity which is more fundamentally opposed to the trend of modern activism than any simple plea for passive inertia.

It is the more important to emphasize this active element in contemplation since we are witnessing to-day

various cults of so-called mysticism in which a negative passivity is extolled in opposition to the use of reason; it cannot be too definitely repeated that this negative irrationalism is poles apart from the attitude we are advocating.

In the first place these cults of the instinctive are as a rule anarchic; they are antagonistic to reason and right order and harmony, whereas the receptivity with which we are concerned is, in its essence, apprehension of ultimate harmony; it is the means by which we are enabled to perceive the unity underlying apparent conflict, the means by which we are enabled, moreover, to draw forth in ourselves an order out of chaos.

In the second place the abandonment of control, conspicuous in these cults of the unconscious, is the antithesis of the act of will involved in a true attitude of acceptance.

To confuse the abandonment of control and reason with the austerity demanded by true creative dependence is to mistake the supreme act of will expressed in "Behold the handmaid of the Lord!" for the inertia of *laissez-faire*.

In so far as we have challenged the supremacy of pure reason it is not on behalf of irrational feeling, but because we recognize a form of knowledge beyond the compass of our active reason—though using it—a kind of knowledge to which our minds may become more receptive, not indeed by the relaxation of tension but by intensity of will.

Moreover, the measure of difference between the highest attainment of our active powers and our receptive potentiality may not be compassed in terms

of knowledge only, but of our being in its entirety.

If I ask the question: "What can I do?" the answer, however gifted I may be, is strictly limited in all directions, limited by time and place and status, by the conditions of my human nature, by my individual characteristics; so far in each direction I can go, and no further can I by my own action go or be; but if I frame my question in the passive, not "What can I do?" but "What can be done with me?" the answer is without limit, without condition; anything, everything, can be done with me.

It is, essentially, to become receptive to power higher and beyond our own, to be the channel and the instrument through which the greater than ourselves can work, in contrast to the self-contained machine.

In the exercise of will involved in such an attitude of acceptance it may be easier to see the lines on which we can increase our passive vision. Our powers of observation may be trained directly, exercised in themselves on their own subject; our receptive faculties cannot be trained in the same way directly, but it is in our power to prepare the way by the act of will in which we are receptive.

It is on this basis that we shall now attempt to study the different forms in which this receptive attitude of mind is seen in its most complete development in:

- (1) The Poet.
- (2) The religious Mystic.

## II

### AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

“But I, my God and my Glory, do also sing a Hymn to Thee, and do consecrate praise to Him who consecrateth me, because those beautiful patterns which through men’s souls are conveyed to their cunning hands, come from that Beauty which is above our souls, which my soul, day and night, sigheth after.”

(St Augustine, *Conf.* X, xxxiv.)

“What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth—whether it existed before or not.”

(Keats, *Letter to Bailey.*)





## I

### *The Poet as Mystic*

Before embarking on a more detailed study of the specialized forms of this receptive vision we should perhaps attempt to summarize its essential characteristics.

So far we have but emphasized the need of seeing in depth, and we have associated this form of perception with a specific attitude to life. For this attitude and this way of seeing we have, moreover, claimed an ultimate primacy of value.

If we are to substantiate our claim for the supreme value of the contemplative approach to life as contrasted with the active, of receptive knowledge as contrasted with rational, we must try to define more exactly what it is that we mean by vision in depth. Actually, as has been emphasized, the two modes of perception, as of being, are so inextricably interrelated that the true form of each includes the other, and either in isolation becomes distorted; but if for the moment we must separate the passive, vertical, immediate, and see it in fictitious isolation, we can regard it from two different angles which in themselves are complementary.

If we envisage perceptions on the first level as reflections from the different facets of one crystal, the second is a geological section, no longer one side of a polygon but layer below layer of reality. Increase of knowledge or vision in this dimension depends, more-

over, on different faculties from the more obvious ways of seeing and knowing, on insight and intuitive perception rather than accuracy of observation; it is a question of profundity rather than the alertness of surface awareness, but—and here is the essential difference—the vision itself is immaterial, a perception of the inner nature of things rather than their apparent characteristics, what they are in themselves intrinsically and what they are in relation to the entire creation.

Immaterial vision of this kind may be of the material world, as in the case of the physicist with his vision of cosmic radiation, but that is in itself a borderland between the worlds of spirit and of matter—as is the world of higher mathematics—and it is more typically concerned with entirely spiritual values, intuitive perceptions, apprehensions, through which the material object looked upon becomes a vehicle of deeper meaning. The sense that “life is not what it seems” characterizes in a general way this kind of vertical perception, though its particular form may vary. It may be a spiritual perception of the inner nature of material things, or it may be, in its purest examples, spiritual perception of the world of the spirit, in which the world of matter seems forgotten. In these higher forms it amounts to a mystical experience.

The subject of mysticism is beset with difficulties at all times, and especially to-day, when, as we have already admitted, the reaction from a rationalist domination shows itself in an indiscriminate cult of the supposed mystic. We find, on the one hand, a tendency to claim as mysticism every kind of non-rational impression; the tendency which finds expression in clairvoyance and

spiritualism of all sorts, from the popular magazines of "prediction" to the various esoteric cults of a so-called "Wisdom of the East"; from *Old Moore's Almanac* to Rudolph Steiner, the impulse and the tendency is the same. In a less esoteric form we find the same misconception in such a production as the *Oxford Book of Mystical Verse*, while in political ideology not only Fascism but also Communism does in fact appeal to a "Mystik".

The equation of the term "mystic" with irrational is harmful and entirely misleading, but it should not be difficult to distinguish the cheap and superficial substitute from the reality it is traducing.

A more significant expression of the reaction against pure rationalism, and one which is more difficult to deal with, is to be found in the present interest in specifically religious, and even Christian, mystics shown by non-believing intellectuals. The later works of Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard, such books as *The Song of Bernadette* and *The Eagle and the Dove*, and their reception, speak for themselves; while in the more scholastic field we find enthusiasm for Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism among avowedly non-religious scholars.

Rightly understood these facts should reinforce our plea for more recognition of passive knowledge, but there is danger in the indiscriminate pursuit of a mysticism that is misconceived. The tendency is here, as always, to flatten out and ignore distinctions which are, in fact, of primary importance; to count as "just the same" or "just as good" qualities or kinds of being which are essentially different both in character and value.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that from the Christian point of view it is impossible to understand the Christian mystic without some realization of his faith, and this implies, in fact, the sharing of it. For the Christian it is a question of grace and supernatural knowledge, of the gifts of wisdom and understanding and, above all, of divine charity, which distinguishes the true religious mystic, and for him, as Christian, a mysticism which falls short of this is necessarily unfruitful and abortive. But it is none the less important to recognize the existence of a natural mystical gift in certain people, a kind of spiritual "hyperaesthesia", seemingly quite unrelated to supernatural faith or sanctity, almost as though for certain types of mind a temperamental aptitude replaced the ascetic preparation of the saint. Of course it does not, and it cannot do so; this natural predisposition, however spiritual and supernormal, is merely in itself so much material awaiting use. It is in itself undifferentiated, neutral, like any other natural faculty, and as with others its final value depends upon the end to which we use it.

Used by a saint, and transformed by grace, this natural aptitude may become an incomparable means to knowledge, the supernatural knowledge of God through love, which is inseparable from holiness, but the essential element in this process is not the initial predisposition, but the grace-actuated will, which makes use of this gift as of any other gift of nature. There is no automatic transformation, no magical apotheosis involved in mystical experience as such apart from grace.

Short of the Christian saint there are of course innumerable varieties and graduations of professed

mystics; Jogis and Sufis of all kinds and schools, for whom the systematic cultivation of mysticism is taken as indispensable to holiness. It is not within the scope of this study to examine their various differences, nor to contrast them with the Christian mystic. The desire for union, in some form, with what is mystically seen would seem to be a constant characteristic of all mystical experience, but the nature of what is apprehended varies greatly; it may remain embryonic, elusive; merely a sense of momentary illumination that slips from us, or it may reach a state of contemplation, an inexplicable contentment—a sense of cosmic harmony and one-ness.

In every case the principle still holds that it is not the experience in itself, but what is made of it, its end, that gives or fails to give it value.

The mystic thus is in a special sense *Capax Dei*, but he no more necessarily attains to the completion which is latent in him than does his average, less gifted brother; and when he does not his failure is proportionate to the opportunity he has missed.

Through grace, in grace, and in no other way, may his natural vision become a foretaste of the Beatific Vision of God, and means of union. Given the reality of the supernatural the merely natural mystic is, as such, whatever natural heights he may attain, the mystic *manqué*.

On the religious basis this seems obvious.

But we have already recognized the poet as an alternative example of super-normal spiritual perception, and he represents a separate and divergent line of progress from the same indeterminate beginning.

The exact relation between the aesthetic and the religious is a delicate and much debated question; that it is close and real and significant cannot reasonably be denied; the aesthetic elements to be discerned in even the highest Christian mysticism, have indeed led some Christian thinkers to reject mystical religion altogether.

Dr Nygren of Upsala, for example, would dismiss all Christian mysticism as aesthetic and therefore symptomatic of the Hellenic Eros-religion which has, for him, corrupted true Christianity.

"Eros-religion is always aesthetic; it is the beauty of the Divine and the ideal that attracts the eye of the soul and sets its love in movement. Consequently 'beholding' 'vision', 'contemplation', are important words in 'Eros-religion'."<sup>1</sup>

In the Platonic and Neo-platonic mystics the Good and the Beautiful are explicitly identified;

"Eros is love for the Beautiful and the Good."<sup>2</sup>

"He (God) is worthy to be loved and is Himself love, namely love to Himself, as He is beautiful only from Himself and in Himself."<sup>3</sup>

Even in the Christian Fathers he finds the aesthetic note prevailing; St Gregory of Nyssa for example says:

"If then the soul is purified of all evil it will be entirely in the sphere of the Beautiful. The Deity is in its very substance beautiful."<sup>4</sup>

No one would challenge Dr Nygren's contention as to the persistence of the aesthetic element in the Christian mysticism of all ages, but it is one element

<sup>1</sup> *Eros and Agape*, Part I, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 204, D.E.    <sup>3</sup> Plotinus, *Aen.*, VI, 8, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *De anima et resurrectione* (P.G., Vol. XLVI).

only in a complex whole. According to Dr Nygren the attempt at synthesis between the two ideas of Christian love, expressed as Agape and Eros, is doomed to fail, but why? We may rather see it as a further and more vital example of the recurrent and creative tension involved in deeper knowledge of the truth.

This brings us to a further consideration of what in fact is implied by "aesthetic".

It is necessary to clear our minds of the extraneous associations connected with the word in modern use; neither Plotinus nor St Gregory of Nyssa can be convincingly described as "aesthetes", yet in both the aesthetic element is important.

The use of the terms "aesthetic" and "poetic" as practically interchangeable is confusing, poetic implying, rightly, a further differentiation, some technical capacity of expression, whereas aesthetic in itself concerns merely the initial apprehension—but, by implication, a supra-normal apprehension. From this point of view aesthetic experience in itself, as isolated from its medium of expression, becomes indistinguishable from natural mystical experience. It is in the next stage, in the fruit which this first illumination yields, that the difference declares itself.

Although to this extent both poet and full mystic have started from a common beginning, it is impossible to class the poet simply as one form of *mystic manqué*; some other element has intervened to modify and deflect his progress in the medium of direct vision; he is different, not merely less.

The subject of poetic experience demands exhaustive study; here we can only touch upon it from the parti-

cular aspect of inner vision; for this purpose it is not in his own right that the poet is of interest, but in so far as he exemplifies receptive vision of a particular kind. This is admittedly a partial view, it is to isolate artificially one among several inter-dependent factors. What we are about to study, in fact, is not the poet as a pure type, if such exist, but rather "the mystical element in poetic experience"—the poet in so far as he is a mystic.

Poetic experience, as we have recognized, differs in kind, not merely in degree, from the full religious mysticism: it represents a different and alternative line of growth from an initial natural predisposition which at least seems undifferentiated. How far in fact the ensuing difference is actually latent from the beginning remains a matter of pure speculation, but leaving out of count all question of the supernatural there is a definite difference of direction, of purpose, between the mystically inclined poet and the aesthetically inclined mystic. If we are to reach a clear conception of the ultimate nature of true vision it is essential to distinguish this often obscure and elusive difference. The question is made more difficult by the extreme rarity of "pure types". Although the true mystic is, as such, different from the poet as such, metaphysically and in the abstract, in actual life, the creative artist of any depth is—apart from his specific poetic gift—most often something of a mystic, while the religious mystic, almost always, is to some degree a poet.

This overlapping in actual life makes it all the more important to distinguish both their real likeness and their unlikeness.

What we have to recognize from the outset is that



the poet or artist is, as such, at the same time both mystic and technician, and although for our particular inquiry it is in his quality of mystic that he is of especial interest, it is necessary to realize how far the actual character of his vision is influenced and limited by the requirements of his technique. As in the case of any other technician, one special faculty of perception has been developed at the expense of others, and of the whole; indeed, the very process of selection involved in any specialized perception implies a corresponding limitation; as in any other kind of achievement an alternative has been rejected, a price paid.

It is not always recognized how far this process of deliberate selection applies to spiritual perception, how even through the receptive apprehension of a truly poetic inspiration this conscious limitation is taking place. The poet in his most receptive state, "budding like a flower under the eye of Apollo", is still receptive only to certain strictly limited impacts, those re-expressible in his specific medium, those of which he feels he can "make something".

As poet he is in fact never saying: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," but always "Tell me something that I can make use of!" and this purposive selection modifies his actual vision.

Here indeed we are brought up against the most fundamental distinction between the creative artist and the mystic; for the artist his vision is a means to an end, a means to action; for the mystic, as such, his vision is ultimate, an end in itself. The poet contemplates in order to act, the mystic acts in order to contemplate.

This statement as it stands may be misunderstood; the mystic's contemplation must not be thought of as static in contrast to the poet's creative action; it is in itself essentially creative, but still in terms of further and deeper vision, inner, not outer, creativity.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the mystic's contemplation must be considered in a later section; here it is the poet that concerns us, and his particular kind of inner vision conditioned, as we must now see it, by his particular technique.

## II

*Poetic Vision*

Although for the purpose of this study we are considering the poet rather under the aspect of mystic than as technician, this is not the generally accepted point of view. In creative art, as in all else, it is the outward and material which attracts general attention; the concrete output rather than the interior activity, which is, in fact, its necessary precursor. We have not, in the nature of things, access to the interior experience from which the outward manifestation has arisen, but we can

- <sup>1</sup> "We make use of this word passivity, because it is the accepted term and because we know no other. But it is well to remark that in mysticism it has an entirely different meaning from that in current use in which it denotes a kind of inertia. The soul in this state while receiving motions of grace stronger and more continuous than before . . . is in reality more active, more free than ever."

(Saudreau, *The Mystical State*, p. 163, note.)

"The passiveness is so much the greater as the mystic state is higher, because God's part in it is more accentuated, but the activity is augmented at the same time."

(Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 5.)

be in direct contact with its external and concrete expression. This is so in the ordinary sequence of everyday experience and action, it is so in an intensified degree in the experience and expression of art. The work of art is there for me to see or hear; the more I am myself aesthetically receptive the deeper will its impact on me be, and though the aesthetic experience its contemplation yields me is not necessarily the same as that from which it has originated, it is direct and real and self-existent, something in itself with which I am in contact.

Whatever we do or are, achieve or suffer, the interplay of action and passivity is integral to our existence, and we have already tried to stress the complementary but separate tension between interior and external activity (the inward phase being both active and passive, the outer, necessarily, active), but in the specifically poetic creation there is a further and more explicit tension in the duality of spirit and matter.

The essence of poetic creation, in fact, consists in the embodiment of an idea in matter, in words, or colour, or shape, or sound, as it may be; the material is directly made use of, deliberately subjected to the spirit, and, in the process, is transformed by it. The colours and sounds were there before, lifeless, inert, chaotic, without meaning; in the creative moment, the spirit enters into them and gives them life. It is the descending Logos striking chaos, it is the Spirit blowing in the valley of dry bones, it is the principle of all creation. And this main incarnational process is no less fundamental and decisive because, in the case of artistic creation, it is itself, in each phase, complex; the initial idea, the spirit,

as apprehended by the creative artist is in itself already half embodied, it is as he conceives it in his mind, already essentially expressible in his medium (as rhythm, or shape, or colour, or whatever it may be); the ultimate expression in matter is thus doubly spirit into matter.

In a predominantly Godless world the term "creative" is liable to misunderstanding; to the anthropocentric humanist it stresses the active independence of the artist rather than his instrumentality, but if once he can be realized as, in proportion to his creative power, participating in the creativity of God his function takes on a new significance.

With this in mind we see that the attempt to isolate inspiration from expressive technique too violently may easily become destructive, merely a further form of flight from tension. A "mute inglorious Milton" is not Milton, but neither is the verbal acrobat.

The exact relation between inspiration and expression has been the subject of endless arguments, and usually, as might have been expected, the emphasis is laid on the external aspect, the concrete output of the work produced, rather than on the interior process in which, in fact, its final value rests.

It is significant that the words "poet" and "artist" both stress the aspect of expression rather than the prerequisite perception, and against such materialism Croce's intransigence is welcome:

"Art is vision or intuition,"<sup>1</sup> or again—

"Every real intuition or representation is at the same time expression"<sup>2</sup> tells us something which the usual

<sup>1</sup> *Breviary of Aesthetics*.    <sup>2</sup> *Aesthetics*, Ch. I.

formulas were obscuring,<sup>1</sup> but when he maintains all failure in expression to depend on failure of vision alone the over-simplification is disappointing.

In view, then, of the prevalent tendency we must establish first of all the reality and the importance of the mystical aspect of the poet, but if we are to form a true impression of even that element of vision which relates him to the religious mystic we must as clearly appreciate his distinguishing characteristics; he is, as poet, both mystic and technician; and as in all other creative synthesis, both elements are essential—in right perspective.

All generalizations are inaccurate and any attempt to define creative art confronts us with an almost limitless range of gradations included in the term in common use.

As in all other attempts at synthesis one or other of the complementary elements may be developed disproportionately; hypertrophied technique results only too often in "slick" painting, "fireworks" in musical execution, or the too facile "leaven of the scribes", whereas inadequate technique defeats itself by a proportionate failure in expression. Here as in all our other pairs of alternatives, balance and right proportion are essential, but even so the right proportion itself will vary greatly in different legitimate forms of art. We have at one end of the scale the craftsman in whom, although a real artistic sense does play its part, the element of spiritual vision is undoubtedly subsidiary to

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to find Newman in his "Essay on Poetry", written in 1828, maintaining that "a talent for composition is no essential part of poetry, though indispensable to its exposition". In other respects his views on Art differ widely from Croce's.

a highly developed active technique, and at the other end the almost inarticulate poet *manqué* in whom the element of passive receptivity has so far outrun any powers he has of re-expression that he can hardly claim his place as artist—and in between these two extremes we meet with every combination and proportion of the two complementary elements.

There is, for instance, decorative art in all its forms, including purely decorative verse, in which the technical skill is closely joined to an external sensitivity, which would seem more akin in nature to the active observation of the scientific observer than to the intuition of the mystic, more horizontal than vertical in direction; the element of exact reproduction, of mimicry, is one form of this, as, for example, in the novels of Jane Austen or in miniature painting. There can be masterpieces of technique in which the beauty of craftsmanship alone seems to justify its own existence, but it is safe to say that all great art, as distinct from mere artistic craftsmanship, implies some measure of spiritual insight, of vision in depth.

The nature of this vision is our concern, and from this point of view, the essential difference between the poet and the average man is one of vision rather than of achievement.<sup>1</sup>

We shall return later to a consideration of the difference in re-expression involved in different kinds of apprehension, but for the moment let us limit our attention to the aesthetic experience in itself.

Although the term “aesthetic” in itself originally

<sup>1</sup> The painter is a painter because he sees what another only feels, or, it may be, glimpses but does not see. Croce, *Aesthetics*, Ch. I.

expresses merely "feeling" of an undifferentiated nature it is habitually associated with a specialized feeling for beauty, a "sense" of beauty; the poet or artist should thus be defined as one in whom sensitivity to beauty is super-normally developed and who is gifted at the same time with some specifically aesthetic technique. At first sight it might seem improbable that the two distinct faculties should coincide, but in fact they usually do; there seems to be an inherent connection between intensity of perception, in whatever medium, and a congruous means of re-expression; it is the absence of this connection that is exceptional.

But what is beauty?

Already we are faced with a further problem and further need for clarification; as with all other forms of increased perception there may be in poetic sensitivity itself, increase externally or increase in depth; either a heightened power of observation, not of practical, but of aesthetic value, an increased sensitivity to the beauty of light or colour or sound or form, receptivity to pure sense impressions; or it may be an increased vision in depth, an intensified reaction to immaterial beauty, to truth seen as beauty, even to the beauty of holiness. This second form of perception, of immaterial beauty, is at the same time more significant in itself and more characteristic of the essential poetic experience.

Actually these two separate forms of increased receptivity—at first sight alternative if not contradictory—are almost always to some extent combined. There is the polarity, the tension, and final fusion between the apparently conflicting lines which we have now learned to look for in all forms of deep vision.

We may say, in fact, that the poet, or the creative artist of any kind, is at the same time more responsive to the particular external impacts of his own specialized technique, whatever it is, than is the average man, and at the same time, in the same act of perception, he sees below and beyond the things he looks at, and apprehends some underlying truth, distinct from and almost in spite of, these impressions.

This quality of seeing bifocally, at two levels, is of the essence of poetic vision, as it is of mystical vision of every kind, and precisely because in at all developed form it is alien to the average mind it is seldom sufficiently realized; we find that the popular idea of the artist dwells almost exclusively on the more obvious of these apparently conflicting aspects, the external sensitivity, and in consequence the artistic temperament is regarded as predominantly sensual.

Some degree of external hyperaesthesia is indeed a usual characteristic of the poetic state in all its forms; the poet is, as it were, alive to infinite delicacies of tone and colour quite imperceptible to the normal eye and ear; at either end of the potential scale of sense-reaction his keyboard is extended; figuratively he is deafened by the bat's shrieking which is inaudible to the average ear. This natural predisposition is, moreover, heightened by the influence of an acquired technique; we have already noticed how in simpler forms the specialized attention will observe all kinds of external manifestation in the particular medium of its technique, and the same is true in every art. It is true, therefore, to say that from this point of view the artistic temperament implies a marked degree of external sensitivity, but this, though the



most obvious, is not the most essential characteristic.

The essential essence of the poetic vision is rather the combination of this external sensitivity with a simultaneous intensification of a non-sensual vision in depth, an often almost imageless intuition which, so far from being alternative and in conflict, is inherent and implicit in it.

Because this hyperaesthesia in depth is far less generally perceptible it is not recognized at all adequately, but it is with this second less obvious form of poetic receptivity that we are now concerned.

There is, however, an especial interest in this particular example of the ever-recurring tension between the inner and outer perception and re-expression inasmuch as aesthetic experience is defined as the response to the impact of beauty, and beauty is envisaged as a rule as sensual beauty. We cannot in fact form any clear conception of the real nature of aesthetic experience until we clarify our idea of beauty.

The nature of beauty is indeed one of the primal questions with which our whole inquiry started; it is a question that has occupied the minds of philosophers from the earliest ages of speculation, and we shall find that as in all other such questions there has been no consensus of opinion.

Idealists and realists, formalists and expressionists, no two authorities are in agreement as to what they mean by the term beauty.

Is it a quality of things in themselves? Is it a relation between things and our minds? Is it a subject of intellect or of will? Is it a question of morals or hedonism? But at the end of reading such discussions we are left with a baffling impression that very few of these philosophers

have themselves experienced the aesthetic impact; they know about beauty, or at least they think about it, but beauty itself they do not know.<sup>1</sup>

There is in consequence much ambiguity as to the meaning of the word as used. If we are to confine our sense of beauty to the purely sensual reaction to a material perfection, literally a sense impression, then the usual definition of aesthetic experience will be definitely inadequate. If, on the other hand, we use beauty in a transcendental sense as including non-material perception we provoke the question whether we are not really speaking figuratively.

What in fact do we mean by Beauty? Is it a transcendental, an ultimate? How far can we accept a Platonic conception of all material beauty, beauty of things, as the imperfect image and reflection of an unseen, intangible perfection? Of:—

“... a beauty which is in the first place eternal, without beginning and without decay, and secondly is not beautiful in one way and ugly in another, nor beautiful at one time and place or from one point of view and then again ugly, as if the beauty depended on the beholders. Nor again will that beauty (to his eyes) take on the likeness of a face or hands or any other fleshly part, nor of speech nor of learning, nor will it have its being in any living thing or in earth, or in the heavens or in any other creature, but will have its simple and essential being within itself. And of it other beautiful things in such wise partake that, while they are all born and then again decay, it neither waxes or wanes nor suffers any change.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his *Philosophies of Beauty* Mr E. F. Carritt gives a fascinating panorama of these heterogeneous theories.

<sup>2</sup> *Symposium*, 210, E.

Some concept of this sort would seem to haunt the minds of poets; it corresponds with some half-formulated sense of a reality behind appearances, a sense of something different in kind from what we actually see or hear.

The metaphysical discussion of beauty is too often pursued in a mental vacuum, without relation to experience, as though its nature could be confined within a mathematical formula. The psychological approach to aesthetic experience is likely to prove more enlightening.

If then we recast our question and ask not "what is beauty?" but "in what does aesthetic experience consist?" or even "what happens to me when I experience the impact of what I call beauty?" we may perhaps get further.

If we are able to free our minds from preconceived ideas of the poetic we shall find the essence of what we mean by an aesthetic response to beauty to consist less of the apprehension of *perfection* than of *potentiality*, less of direct appreciation of some concrete and material beauty than of the sense of contrast between the impression received and something other; it is in some form a perception of the quality-of-eternity in relation to, in contrast to, the things of time; a relation of the individual to the universe, a momentary escape from time and place that is in some inexpressible way dependent on an intensified perception of the actual things of time and place.

We might restate our thesis in these terms:

Although the creative artist, as craftsman, has a highly developed practical technique it is not this which distinguishes him from the plain man so much as his more highly developed power of vision; although

this increased power of vision includes, and necessarily, an increased sensitivity to external impressions it is not this which distinguishes him so much as his seemingly conflicting power of inner vision, an interior perception which at times obliterates the very external observation in which it is, paradoxically, inherent.

He will watch from dawn to gloom  
 The lake-reflected sun illumine  
 The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,  
 Nor heed nor see what things they be;  
 But from these create he can  
 Forms more real than living man,  
 Nurselings of immortality.<sup>1</sup>

But having got so far we must return full circle and add that what distinguishes the creative artist from the merely sensitively perceptive, or the various forms of "natural mystic", is that he combines this dual vision with a specific artistic technique, and that it is only inasmuch as he does so that he is aesthetically creative.<sup>2</sup>

### III

#### *Discursive and Intuitive Art*

The essential characteristic of the poetic vision is, from this point of view, the apprehension of a spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, I, 743-9.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with this poetic unconsciousness the contemplation described by St John of the Cross:

"At other times too, this Divine light strikes the soul with such force that it neither perceives darkness, nor observes light, neither does it apprehend aught that it knows . . . and when the soul awakens, this knowledge leaves in it the effects which it created in it without its being conscious of them."

(*Mt Carmel*, Bk. II, ch. XIV, 10.)

reality in, or at times it would appear in spite of, the material reality before us; a perception of the timeless in, or in spite of, time; this element of contrast is important; it is implicit in true poetic vision, but it is by no means always explicit.

Consideration of this point confronts us with a further important subdivision; two very different forms of poetic response to an initial aesthetic sense-impression.

There is what we may call discursive art, the visual or vocal reproduction of either a witnessed or an imagined scene, from which reflections may be drawn, rationally, and appropriately, and there is the intuitive, apocalyptic, essentially non-rational response in which the relationship between the initial impact and inner response is obscure, in which indeed the element of contrast may obliterate the sequence.<sup>1</sup>

The poetry of Wordsworth affords perhaps the most complete example of the first type, providing as it does not only detailed description of the external scene but also reasonable reflections connected with, and appropriate to, the situation. There is no element of surprise or contrast; such comparison as exists is of a reasonably expected nature; comparison between human transience and the durability of the mountains, the beauty of spring and the passing of hope, and so on. Wordsworth is indeed most commonly cited as a conspicuous example of natural mysticism, but even the well-known descriptions of his own mystical experiences are for the

<sup>1</sup> This distinction is not identical with the division between the classic and the romantic, nor yet with Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysiac, yet it is to be noted that in most theories of art some such distinction seems called for.

most part curiously discursive, and even prosaic; he tells us about an immediate intuition, what it was like, what reflections he drew from it, but he very seldom expresses it directly. It is the more notable that when he does so the change is so complete; the habitual almost prosaic tempo is broken through at times, though very rarely, by flashes of unexpected immediacy that seem to come from quite another mind, as though the conscientious nature-lover had become momentarily possessed; some of these flashes would indeed almost serve as examples of the contrasted intuitive type of art, though in the main and characteristically Wordsworth, as poet, stands undoubtedly for discursive art, as in the following characteristic lines:

. . . Finally, "whate'er  
I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream  
That flowed into a kindred stream; a gale,  
Confederate with the current of the soul,  
To speed my voyage; every sound or sight,  
In its degree of power, administered  
To grandeur or to tenderness,—to the one  
Directly, but to tender thoughts by means  
Less often instantaneous in effect;  
Led me to these by paths that, in the main,  
Were more circuitous, but not less sure  
Duly to reach the point marked out by Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

In painting we have the Pre-Raphaelites, or—for it can be either romantic or classic—the eighteenth-century portrait painters.

In music we have perhaps Bach or Haydn, though many philosophies of art put music in a class apart as

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, Bk. VI, 742-53.

being in its nature unconformable to their general principles.<sup>1</sup>

In all these forms of discursive art, the movement is predominantly horizontal; the thought or the emotion is unfolded along the expected and congruous lines. We either deliberately select from the actual scene before us such items as will induce the desired reaction, or in the rather more romantic style we evoke imaginary forms with the same conscious purpose. In either form the process is in fact a conscious composition, constructed towards a preconceived intention. The element of inspiration is there or it would not be artistic creation, but it is subject to an active purpose; we know where we are going, what we intend to do, we are in the last resort still "masters of our fate".

In such forms of art there is an obvious relation between the external object being considered and the reflections that are elaborated. The ruins of a cathedral provoke reflections of departed grandeur, tombs and funereal urns, thoughts of death; lambs and young girls suggest innocence and so on through the vast range of accepted poetic imagery. What follows is in each case what we expect to follow. The reflections are appropriate, there is a sequence and congruity.

Much great art in all traditions is of this type; it would be superficial to disparage it because it can be subject to a debasement, but for the purpose of our

<sup>1</sup> "Music is to be judged by quite other aesthetical principles than are the plastic arts, and especially not by the category of beauty." (Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*.)

"In music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance, or matter, the subject from the expression."

(Pater, *The Renaissance*.)

study it is the alternative which is of interest, the intuitional poetic response in which the receptive element predominates so wholly that there appears to be no conscious purpose, no deliberate willed end in view, in what is looked upon or expressed.<sup>1</sup> The principle of selective vision is in fact even more strongly operative in this latter case than in the former, but the principle at work is more interior.

In this second form of aesthetic experience we still have a connection between some external sense impression and the spiritual vision within; some definite actual impact, whether experienced in fact or imagined, provokes in this case too the interior response, but whereas in the first case cause and effect are congruous and rationally consequent, in this second non-discursive form there seems no obvious relation between the initial sense impression and the emotional reaction to it. There is an apparent gap and discrepancy often amounting to a contradiction between the expectation and its fulfilment. The peculiar poignancy of joy, the pleasure of tragedy, are rather crude and obvious examples of the principle behind this form of intuitive poetic response.

If we take Wordsworth as exemplifying the discursive type of poet we may take Blake or Keats as, in very different ways, representing the second more wholly intuitive type; and in painting, El Greco or the French Impressionists.

Surrealism illustrates, of course, the extreme of this non-rational art.

<sup>1</sup> Some element of this intuitional response may be intrinsic to all true poetic creation, but its relative importance to the work as a whole legitimately varies very greatly.



We might at first be inclined to define the first discursive form of aesthetic experience as the faculty of seeing the spiritual *in* the material, and the second as seeing the spiritual value *through* and *in spite of* space and time, but this would be an over-simplification. The truth is that the intuitive life of vision consists also in seeing a spiritual reality not, in spite of, but in, the actual world we look at, but at a deeper level.

The seemingly incongruous response of the intuitive poet to his environment may in an individual case indicate schizophrenia, but it is far more likely to arise from a half-conscious apprehension of a far deeper reality underlying the apparent circumstances.

There is congruity and relation between his inner vision and its re-expression; there is, moreover, some profound relation between the inner vision that he sees and the material which has, apparently, obscured it.

As against the appropriate reflection we have:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV

#### *Tension*

So far we have attempted an analysis of the poetic experience in itself, apart from metaphysical definitions,

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge: *Kubla Khan*, 49-54.

but even so our analysis has been too abstract and general; let us now examine more in detail what happens to the individual concerned when he experiences aesthetic response to the impact of what he knows as beauty.

I believe that the essence of that experience consists in a sudden increase of emotional tension, usually out of all proportion to its immediate external cause. This emotional tension may be either pleasurable or painful, most characteristically it is a simultaneous sense of both extremes, a pleasurable pain, a painful pleasure, either of which may reach the point of tears.<sup>1</sup>

We are so accustomed to associate this emotion with recognition of beauty that we instinctively call "beautiful" that which we find elicits such response; this is to put the cart before the horse. If we can free our minds sufficiently from all our preconceived ideas of beauty we shall find that the particular quality which is common to all the various things and situations which do in practice move us in this way conforms to no accepted definition of beauty.

We have already suggested that in general what we perceive with this especial emotion is rather potentiality than perfection, and following out the same line of thought we may add that the most characteristic reaction is rather a sense of poignancy than of mere admiration.

*Sunt lacrimae rerum* is, as it stands, too meditative, too gentle and moderate in tone to express such tensivity of feeling, it is indeed too partial, too one-sided, but it

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle's famous fusion of "Pity-Terror" is one attempt at its analysis.

suggests one element at least, and an important one, of this essentially complex reaction.

In order to convey at all adequately what we mean by this sense of poignancy we might harmonize and fuse the two apparently conflicting reactions: *sunt lacrimae rerum* and *quam mirabilia opera tua Domine*.

Taken as they are as a rule taken, these two different phrases represent two distinct emotional reactions to the impact of life upon us. In the specifically aesthetic reaction both are experienced simultaneously, though the two elements are by no means equal.

In general we shall find the second (pleasurable) reaction predominant in the simpler forms of aesthetic experience; the most superficial and least complex impact of what we still think of as the beautiful produces an indefinite delight, a sense of acclamation and completion, the sense of having reached what we were seeking. It is this sense of, at times ecstatic, joy which usually suggests the relation between aesthetic and religious experience, but a deeper reality is impoverished if, in our effort to relate beauty and goodness, poetic and religious ecstasy, we minimize the equally essential pain. This element of pain, moreover, tends to increase, even predominate, as the experience itself increases in intensity and depth, as it approximates more nearly to a mystical experience.

A shrinking from the expected impact, almost, we might say a fear of beauty, is a quite recognized feature in certain types of poetic temperament; beauty is thought of as something that hurts, just as love can be something that wounds. The close connection between love and suffering is fully enough recognized and ex-

pressed in the traditional symbolism of the shafts of love, and beauty as limited and identified with a particular beloved beauty is conventionally acknowledged as wounding. So far so good: a truth is thus expressed, but so limited, it is partial and incomplete. What we have to recognize and acknowledge is a connection between beauty itself, the particular poignancy which we identify with the beautiful, whether material or immaterial, and pain. It need not be in fact "the coldness of my dear" from which I suffer; it may even be that she is not cold at all, that the ecstatic joy of her possession has become in itself a source of pain.

That the connection exists there is no doubt; the various distortions and perversions associated with this seeming contradiction do, rightly seen, but emphasize its truth;<sup>1</sup> it is significant both in itself as an essential mark of real poetic experience in depth and also as a further indication of the real nature of all passive vision.

We have already stressed the extreme gradations included in aesthetic experience; a sense of beauty can include appreciation of all beauty of form, almost of all achievement in technique; the pleasure in wearing a beautiful garment is no doubt partly personal vanity, but it is also in part aesthetic pleasure. The pleasurable effect of a good colour or sound seems to be simple and immediate, the element of painful tension in such direct and surface level impacts is negligible, but as our passivity increases, the impact and the ensuing apprehension so deepen that their quality is altered. There is a point at which the inner receptivity of the artist, by

<sup>1</sup> A morbid and perverted recognition of this essential truth is found in Sadism.

far exceeding the outer, becomes itself so hypersensitive that there has ceased to be a real distinction between pleasure and pain, there is pure feeling, and feeling itself hurts, yet feeling such as this is life and must be welcomed.

Actually the word feeling is misleading, suggesting as it does sense-feeling only, whereas the whole point of our argument is that in poetic experience of this kind sense-feeling has given way to passive vision.

It is significant in this connection that in proportion to the increase of tension the outer stimulus required would seem to change in character; the sight or sound which makes the specific impact is as a rule less obviously beautiful; the element of poignancy will dominate still more at the expense of any accepted form of beauty. The relation between impact and response becomes less obvious and less congruous as our receptivity increases until it hardly matters what actual external object makes the impact; so the receptive faculty be attuned to the required pitch of passive attention it seems that almost any sense impression of certain quality and texture may effect the creative explosion, as a spark falling on to petrol vapour or a light blow on compressed TNT.

It may be moonlight on dark water, a skylark singing above a ploughed spring field, autumn leaves falling through still air; it may be lamplight reflected in the mud of the street, shapes in a fog, a cloud of sea gulls; it may be the gaunt shapes of cranes in shipyards, the glinting steel inside a factory, smoke in a railway station—or it may be a few notes of music or a sound of bees, the scent of lavender or jasmine or of damp earth, the feel of sunlight or of water . . . there is always in all

such impressions some half-recognized associational value apart from the actual sense satisfaction, and as a rule there is some element of transience, a suggestion of time passing, of the elusive in contrast to an unspecified lastingness.

In an aesthetic experience of this order the emotional tension is connected with a sense of esoteric knowledge, a vision of some hidden mystery; there is a sense of being in relation with the nature of the universe, of seeing or being on the point of seeing, some transcendental truth that has up to now been unsuspected. It is in fact a definitely mystical experience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this connection it is interesting to compare the mystical character of Beethoven's music as emphasized by Mr J. W. N. Sullivan:

"The life in the last string quartet is as full, varied and intense as anywhere in Beethoven's music. But these aspects of life that Beethoven formerly presented as contrasted he now presents as harmoniously flowering from a single stem. Life's experiences are still presented with all their diversity, but no longer as conflicting.

"In these quartets the movements radiate, as it were, from a central experience. They do not represent stages in a journey, each stage being independent and existing in its own right. They represent separate experiences, but the meaning they take on in the quartet is derived from their relation to a dominating central experience. This is characteristic of the mystic vision, to which everything in the world appears unified in the light of one fundamental experience. In these quartets, then, Beethoven is not describing to us a spiritual history; he is presenting to us a vision of life. In each quartet many elements are surveyed but from one central point of view. They are presented as apprehended by a special kind of awareness, they are seen in the light of one fundamental experience." (J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven*, Cape, 1927.)

(Cf. Maritain's comparison of the vertical and horizontal progress in metaphysics, quoted on p. 40.)

Poetic experience of this kind is closely related to the true mystic's, and on our supposition of their common beginning so much at least is to be expected, but there are parallels in method, in the process and the experience through which the passive vision is apprehended, which are less readily acknowledged, and which are none the less enlightening.

We have already touched upon the analogy between different forms of poetic expression and corresponding forms of prayer, but the connection here is in some ways so striking that it should be considered in more detail.

In the first place we have the parallel between discursive and descriptive art and the discursive meditation so categorically described in classic treatises on prayer. In both an appropriate subject is selected, in both the ensuing reflections and emotions are deliberately evoked and directed towards a determined end.

Meditation is an internal prayer in which a devout soul doth in the first place take in hand the consideration of some particular mystery of faith, to the end that by a serious and exact search into the several points and considerations in it, with the understanding or imagination she may extract motives of good affections towards God and consequently produce suitable affections in virtue of the said motives, as long as such virtue will last.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly we have a parallel between the more intuitive art expressions and contemplative prayer, in which the conscious action of the mind is gradually stilled, and such mental images as occur would seem to rise spontaneously, unbidden.

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Augustine Baker, *Secretum Sive Mysticum*, Ch. I.

"There is a mystic contemplation . . . by which a soul without discourings and curious speculations, without any perceptible use of the internal senses, or sensible images, by a pure, simple, and reposeful operation of the mind, in the obscurity of faith, simply regards God as the infinite and incomprehensible Verity, and with the whole bent of her will rests in Him as the infinite, universal, and incomprehensible Good."<sup>1</sup>

A further analogy can be discerned in the actual form of mental imagery.

All treatises on prayer foreshadow a higher stage of contemplation in which the receptive mind grows "imageless",

"The spirit of God speaketh also in man without images and forms, or rather, raised above all images and forms This speech is Life and Light and Truth."<sup>2</sup>

"In which union, above all particular images, there is neither time nor place, but all is vacuity and emptiness, as if nothing were existent but God and the soul."<sup>3</sup>

This is presented as the development to be expected if we progress through the preceding stages of prayer, but similar stages in "profane" mental states are not, I think, so generally acknowledged.

It is well known that many children have, at a certain age, a peculiar facility of verbal memory which later leaves them. During this phase a child may learn by heart any amount of poetry or prose often beyond its powers of comprehension; there is a special receptivity to words out of proportion to the understanding and here perhaps we have a parallel with the first phase of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*    <sup>2</sup> Tauler, *The Following of Christ*, Part I, 133.

<sup>3</sup> *Sancta Sophia*, Sec. IV, Ch. I.



"vocal prayer". The same is often true of visual imagination; this varies greatly in different children, but it is true to say that in most there is a power of mental imagery which fades and vanishes as they grow older.<sup>1</sup> When it does not fade but develops this faculty of mental imagery is associated with artistic gifts. There is indeed a sense in which a power of mental imagery can be taken as the distinctive feature of the artist, but it is less generally recognized that in the artist himself the character of his mental imagery will vary at different stages of his artistic growth.

Although in one sense it is true that there will be a direct relation between the force of the poetic vision and the vividness of the subsequent image, it is also true that this vividness itself may change its character not from any failure of inspiration but from a further growth in vision. We shall find that in many cases the more concrete image gives way to less material though equally dynamic forms; or it may be a change rather in tempo, in an increasing quiet and harmony. In either case the general process is one of simplification, but of true not superficial simplification, an increasing economy of material in which to embody the idea.

In contemplative prayer the growing simplification is explicit:

<sup>1</sup> Père Louismet would go so far as to discern a definitely contemplative gift in children:

"In early childhood, people contemplate more than they understand, but when once this stage is passed, I think that the contemplative mechanism becomes rusty in many people. Yet this mechanism remains, none the less, an essential cog in the spiritual organism." (Op. cit.)

"Grace solicits interiorly those who would become perfect to simplify themselves that they may become capable of enjoying the one thing necessary . . . that is, eternal unity . . . Meditation is very good in its time and very useful at the beginning of the spiritual life, but we must not stop at it, since the soul, by its fidelity to mortification and recollection, usually receives a purer and more interior form of prayer which may be called the prayer of simplicity. This consists in a simple interior view, regard or loving attention towards some divine object, either God in Himself or some of His perfections, or Jesus Christ or some of His mysteries, or other Christian verities. Then the soul, abandoning all reason, falls into a sweet contemplation which keeps her in peace, attentive, and susceptible to the divine operations and impressions which are communicated to her by the Holy Spirit. She does little and receives much.

. . . The less the creature labours the more powerfully does God work."<sup>1</sup>

In this case the change is ascribed specifically to an increase in passivity through which our own powers have become less obtrusive and God acts more directly on the soul. Sometimes we are told of a decisive change from an acquired to an infused contemplation; sometimes the process is described as gradual, but in either case surely we may discern a significant parallel in the growing passivity of mind through which the spiritual reality apprehended predominates increasingly in relation to the material it is transcending. Apart from the question of change and growth in an individual mind there is, of course, a vast difference from the outset in the kind of mental imagery in which both the poetic and the mystic vision will be re-expressed in different minds.

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Instructions sur les états d'oraison*, Bk. VII.

The imagery of Keats, for instance, is complicated although its spiritual content is dynamic. This may be partly due to youth; we may conjecture that, supposing his spiritual vision to have continued as intense and compelling as in youth, a Keats in middle age would have expressed equivalent vision in simpler and less redundant symbols. In Rilke, whom we know in middle life, the transformation is already in process; the images of the *Duine Elegies* are already impersonal.

In speaking of "imageless" apprehension it is important to recognize that such a phrase can be but relative; there is a change of mental imagery, the material forms in which our thought is clothed become less realistic, more symbolic, but there are still, and must be, images.<sup>1</sup> Even the high contemplative mystics are full of images in their expression of non-sensual vision; the change is rather from personal to non-personal imagery. Instead of a concrete image of the Passion or of the saints they may speak of light or darkness or a cloud, symbolic imagery implying some further hidden truth, a mystery; or it may be that the same concrete image itself alters in texture, becomes more translucent, more changed into spirit while keeping its external form, the material not discarded but transmuted in a culminating fusion, as in the final visions of the Passion; and, in proportionately less degree, the same is true of the poetic image.

But perhaps the most striking analogy consists in the

<sup>1</sup> "Impossibile est nobis aliter Lucere divinum radium nisi varietate sacrorum velaminum circumvelatum." Dionysius. *Div. Hier. Cap. I (Sum. Theol., Ia, Q.1, A.9)*.

increased emotional tension which characterizes both mystical and poetic experience.

We have seen already that in the case of the poet this moment of poignancy, of painful joy, may vary greatly, from the mere pathos of *lacrimae rerum* to the agony implicit in the last lines of *Hyperion*,<sup>1</sup> and it is only in its intenser forms that it is in any way comparable to the suffering of the mystic, but that an analogy exists between them must be clear to any impartial and sympathetic study. This is a point of particular importance since it has a direct bearing on the nature of all inward vision.

To avoid possible misunderstanding let me re-emphasize that in this chapter we are regarding the mystic only naturally, as a temperamental human type; and from this point of view we are deliberately ignoring the supernatural character of his experience; we are seeing, so far as we can, his likeness to, not his difference from, the poet; the difference must be considered later. This deliberate exclusion of his most important characteristic becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as we penetrate more deeply into the experience of the mystic, but the consciousness of ultimate distinction should not obscure the true analogy, which in its very elements of likeness does ultimately emphasize the difference.

Regarded from an objective point of view the close relation between joy and pain in all forms of intuitive perception is in itself a marked characteristic. For the poet, as we have already seen, the ecstatic moment of

<sup>1</sup> Sibelius while working on his Fourth Symphony writes to a friend that he is experiencing: "Hours of creative anguish, more sublime than ever before." (Quoted in the *Observer*, 2 Dec. 1945.)

perception is accompanied by a joyful illumination, a sense of utter well-being, at the same moment that his emotional being is racked by an acute sense of the pain of things, but neither joy nor pain reaches to the depths of his being, they are, as it were, in emotional middle-distance, whereas in the experience of the mystic the fusion of ecstatic joy and pain is carried to a far greater pitch of depth and tension. St John of the Cross says:

“For such is the wretchedness of our mortal nature, that we cannot bear—even when it is offered to us—but at the cost of our life, that which is the very life of the soul, and the object of its earnest desires, namely the knowledge of the Beloved . . .

“So great, at times, is the suffering of the soul during these ecstatic visitations . . . that, were it not for the special interference of God death would ensue.”<sup>1</sup>

And again:

“Oh happy and most blessed wound! For thou art inflicted only for the joy and comfort of the soul. Great is the wound, because He is great Who has wrought it; and great is the delight of it; for the fire of love is infinite . . . This burning and wound, in my opinion, are the highest condition attainable in this life. There are many other forms of this burning, but they do not reach so far, neither are they like unto this; for this is the touch of the Divinity without form or figure, either natural, formal, or imaginary.

“. . . When the burning brand touches it, the soul feels that the wound it has thus received is delicious beyond all imagination. For beside being altogether moved or stirred, at the time of this stirring of the fire . . . it feels the very depth of the spirit transpierced, and its delight to be exquisite beyond the power of language to express.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Canticle*, Stan. XIII, 3-4.    <sup>2</sup> *Living Flame*, Stan. II, 9-10.

and St Teresa is as explicit:

"It is impossible to describe or explain the way in which God wounds the soul, or the very grievous pain inflicted, which deprives it of all self-consciousness; yet this pain is so sweet, that there is no joy in the world which gives greater delight. As I have just said, the soul would wish to be always dying of this wound."

Even leaving out of consideration the supernatural, and, as in that case we are bound to do, ignoring the mystic's own account of what has happened to him, there can be little doubt that the experience expressed in these passages is totally beyond the compass of the poetic ecstatic moment; yet the question must present itself: To what extent is this experience merely the poetic experience carried further? A difference in degree but not in kind? In both, as we have seen, the central fact is an immediate vision in depth, a sense of seeing through the stuff of things to a reality behind them. There is in both, moreover, not only vision but a sense of contact, of unity; in both there is the escape from time and place; there is, moreover, recognition of supreme value in the reality perceived, and though in very different degrees, an impulse towards adoration.

This is an important point; the moral inadequacy of the poet by any ordinarily accepted standard often obscures this underlying truth. He may be, and in fact he often is, bewilderingly obtuse and blind to what for us are moral obligations; there may be a peculiar lack of delicacy where moral sensitivity is concerned, but in so far as he is an artist there will be in him, obscure and inarticulate perhaps, allegiance to his transcendental

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, Ch. XXIX, 13.

vision, of the reality behind appearance. This may be phrased as his devotion to beauty, to the integrity of art; it may be and often is distorted and misconceived, almost at times a form of Satanism, but it is, if we understand it rightly, always a good wrongly apprehended, always a consequence of defective vision.

There is often a sense of expectation, anticipation of regeneration and new birth, which seeks expression in religious language, though wholly devoid of any moral awareness. There is no sense of sin, no search for redemption, no love of God nor wish for sanctity. The whole experience, ecstatic and esoteric as it may be, is still distinct from religious experience in the Christian sense; it is spiritual but not supernatural, and the difference is so fundamental that ultimately it by far outweighs the outstanding and real analogy.

We might best convey the truth by saying that poetic experience, in its highest forms, is religious but never Christian; we should find the closest parallel perhaps in the non-Christian Mystery religions.

## V

### *Inspiration*

Always passivity of a certain tenseness both contains in itself and will give rise to some compensatory activity; but, as we have already emphasized, that activity itself is not necessarily external. It may be immaterial and inward, a change of being rather than doing. The contemplative saint may be an admirable administrator, but he may equally live his entire life in unspectacular obscurity; it would be no less true, on that account,

that his passivity had resulted in an interior activity. Poetic creation, on the other hand, involves a concrete and external re-expression. In every case, in fact, the two phases are inextricably connected both as alternating and as co-inhering. But poetic inspiration gives us the simplest and clearest illustration of impact and re-expression, the medium of both impact and response being some form of concrete sense impression. The actual moment of poetic vision is, as we have tried to show, one of spiritual intuition, not sensual, but that is transitory between the incoming sense impression and its re-expression in like terms, and therefore in the case of poetic art the process is more generally recognized than it is in other forms of action in which it is as surely taking place.

The relative proportion of the two phases will vary greatly according to the type and quality of the poetic experience concerned, but in all forms of true artistic creation, as indeed in all spiritual activity of whatever kind, there will be a direct relation between the proportion of passivity and the dynamism of the creative moment.

Most poets seem aware to some extent of this rhythm taking place within themselves, a process of "possession" which they interpret differently according to individual circumstances. In the intuitive type of poet with which we are especially concerned it is as a rule most definite and conscious; some of the most illuminating accounts are given in Keats' letters:

"The simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness . . . I assure you I some-



times feel not the influence of a Passion or affection during a whole week . . . and so long this sometimes continues I begin to suspect myself and the genuineness of my feelings at other times, thinking them a few barren Tragedy-tears.”<sup>1</sup>

“It has been an old comparison for our urging on—the Beehive; however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing about here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be aimed at; but let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo.”<sup>2</sup>

In his most interesting study of Keats and Shakespeare Mr Middleton Murry is at pains to stress this element of passivity in Keats. He traces (with almost exaggerated perception) the spiritual drama of acceptance expressed, for those who once obtain the key, in terms of apparently artificial imagery. This work of sympathetic interpretation is stimulating, but Mr Murry’s work is of less value through his apparent unawareness of the universal nature of the experiences he finds in Keats. For him the spiritual struggle expressed in the line quoted from *Hyperion*, “Knowledge enormous makes a god of me”, is of interest primarily as being exceptional; it is Keats as a unique being, as marked out most sharply from his fellows, that attracts Mr Murry’s admiration, but he seems curiously unaware of his representative character, as a type, a symbol, at the same time unique and universal.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 1817.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to J. H. Reynolds, Feb. 1818.

It is true that in one note in the appendix he refers to Eckhardt, and suggests other possible mystical parallels, but he clearly fails to realize the degree to which the experience he discerns in Keats is a recognized characteristic of mystical experience in general.

Among English poets Keats is perhaps the most explicit in expressing the involuntary passivity of poetic creation, and its succeeding ecstatic phase—but an even more detailed description of the state of numbness or stupidity, described by Keats in the first extract (and in other letters), is given by the French poet, Maurice de Guérin, according to his biographer, M. d'Harcourt:

“Guérin likes to analyse these states of immobility which, he knows, precede the crises of poetic creation. ‘It is a half sleep’, he says, ‘it is like a temperate and tranquil ecstasy which ravishes the soul out of itself . . . A strong stupor seizes me, I remain immobile, feeling nothing but the heavy crippling fixity of life which seems to be arrested in an incomprehensible state of discomfort.’

“... but underneath this veil, his soul is much more active than in the fully waking state of a natural activity.”<sup>1</sup>

And Rilke's account of the poet's experience stresses another aspect of its inspirational or receptive character. Less lucid and less human than either Keats or de Guérin, the experience he implies is clearly akin:

“Everywhere appearance and vision came, as it were, together in the object, in every one of them a whole inner

<sup>1</sup> *Maurice de Guérin* by M. d'Harcourt, quoted Brémont, *Histoire du sentiment religieux en France*, Vol. XI, p. 429.

The parallel between these states of ‘poetic stupor’ and the ‘ligature’ distinctive of one stage in contemplative prayer as described by many masters is striking.

world was exhibited, as though an angel, in whom space was included, were blind and looking into himself.”<sup>1</sup>

and:

“... Just because of that very provisionality they share with us, all these appearances and things should be comprehended by us in a most fervent understanding, and transformed. Transformed? Yes, for our task is to stamp this provisional, perishing earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately that its being may rise again “invisibly” in us. We are the bees of the Invisible.

“... only in us can this intimate and enduring transformation of the visible into an invisible no longer dependent on visibility and tangibility, be accomplished, since our own destiny is continually growing at once MORE ACTUAL AND INVISIBLE within us.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the poet is naturally best qualified to give a verbal account of his own creative experience we have good evidence that the same process, more or less, takes place in every medium.

Many musicians are indeed as explicit.

Sibelius, writing of the composition of his Fifth Symphony, says:

“When the final form of one’s work is indeed dependent on powers that are stronger than oneself, later on, one can substantiate this or that, but on the whole one is merely a tool. This wonderful logic . . . let us call it God . . . that governs a work of art is the forcing power.”<sup>3</sup>

and Haydn, in his old age, describes himself as “played upon by fantasy as though he were a piano.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters*, 1914-1921. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Witold van Hulewicz, 1925.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in the *Observer*, 2 Dec. 1945.

<sup>4</sup> “Musical ideas pursue me . . . they stand before me like

While Elgar's well-known remark that "there is music in the air, music all round us, the world is full of it, and you simply take as much as you require,"<sup>1</sup> gives us merely another version of an equivalent receptivity.

## VI

*The Mantic*

The idea of divine inspiration is of course implicit in the traditional concept of the poet. From Homer's invocation to the Muse at the beginning of the *Odyssey* we meet it as the recurrent assumption in every epoch of poetic form, and as a counterpart to this assumption we find the close connection between the inspired poet and the prophet (or mystic) in all primitive communities.

The primitive bard is as a matter of course a Seer, one who knows not so much the future as "the hidden present", the "hidden nature of things".

In an illuminating study of "The Mantic", Mrs N. K. Chadwick has demonstrated the invariable connection between the poetic gift and prophecy among contemporary primitives.<sup>2</sup>

"The fundamental elements of the prophetic function

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a wall. Is it an Allegro that pursues me? then my pulse beats ever faster and I cannot sleep. Is it an Adagio? then I notice that my pulse beats slower; Fantasy plays upon me as though I were a piano . . . I am really a living piano."

(Letter to A. C. Diess.)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Sir Edward Elgar*, by R. J. Buckley.

<sup>2</sup> *Poetry and Prophecy*, Mrs N. K. Chadwick, Cambridge University Press.

seem to have been everywhere the same. Everywhere the poetic gift of poetry is inseparable from divine inspiration. Everywhere this inspiration carries with it knowledge whether of the past, . . . of the hidden present, . . . or of the future. Always this knowledge is uttered in poetry."

The religious character of the poetic gift is undisputed;

"Invariably we find that the poet and seer attributes his inspiration to contact with supernatural powers, and his mood during prophetic utterance is exalted and remote from that of his normal existence."<sup>1</sup>

But it is equally emphasized that this contact is only to be attained through a cultivated receptivity.

"The Mantic trains himself by a rigorous spiritual discipline. By his early segregation, by his devotion to a contemplative life, by his periods of concentration in seclusion he trains himself as a spiritual and intellectual specialist."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the actual vision is often superinduced by a definite ritual technique.

When the required state has been attained the Mantic Poet emerges from his quiescence into a variety of active expressions; poetic utterance, singing, and dancing.

This is merely in more unsophisticated form the rhythm we have considered in Keats and Rilke.

The fact that the Bashkir Shaman's technique is alien to our own tradition should not obscure for us the close relation between the Mantic ecstasy on the one hand and on the other the normal process of aesthetic creation, nor yet, regarded from a slightly different angle, with the experience of the religious mystic.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 14.    <sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 57.

"The period of quiet preparation has been utilized by the mind to think away the immediate and the material as much as to reinstate itself in another environment . . . the material world has been removed to the outer verge of consciousness. The focus is on spiritual things."<sup>1</sup>

The parallel between this state and the preparatory state of quiet described in such passages as the following is obvious:

"Try then . . . to still your thoughts and to be silent, that is to say to silence the chatter of your senses . . . to clear your imagination of all images of created things, to strip your memory of all ideas of creatures and of all knowledge,—to put away all discourse from your understanding; . . . to thrust out all natural light, admitting into the sanctuary in the depth of your soul nothing but the simple ray of a live faith, abstract, pure, universal, free from discourse, images and acts; and in this loving acquiescence, in this fixed attention, in this intimate union, so much the stronger as it is unperceived, so much the more exquisite as it is simple, so much the more valuable as it is less felt, hold yourself close to God; throw yourself into this holy blindness, more penetrating than any sight . . . into this fog, this resplendent cloud, so celebrated by the mystics."<sup>2</sup>

We have in fact in these primitive Mantics a most illuminating example of the essential underlying connection between poetic experience and the religious vision of the true mystic, not only in the natural predisposition which we have recognized as a starting-point for both forms of interior perception, but as continuing far further into their functional expression.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Camus: *La Lutte Spirituelle*, pp. 26-30. (Quoted Brémond, op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 159.)

Poetic vision, as we know it to-day, is distinct from mystical vision, and we have recognized the fundamental nature of the existing difference between them, but the apparent fusion of the two, not merely as unformulated tendency, but as articulate expression, must raise the question as to the soundness of their subsequent separation. If the union between poet and mystic is indeed capable of continuation beyond the phase of undifferentiated tendency, how has it happened that at a later stage, when each develops more fully, such vital relation should be lost, or if not wholly lost so greatly weakened?

It is, as we have already indicated, only in the full religious mystic that we shall find an adequate explanation of passive knowledge in its full potentiality; only in relation to him, in contrast to him, that we can fully understand the poet, or indeed any other form of passive vision; but before we attempt this final summing up there may be much to learn by going backwards, back to the common roots from which, in different ways, both spring.

If we consider the fully developed poet in relation to the primitive seer we shall find that the teleological selection which distinguishes poetic vision, as such, has so sharply divided him from his more elemental prototype that he has lost the sacramental aspect which was, for the mantic himself, the most important. He has acquired a far fuller poetic proficiency at the cost of his mystical or prophetic function.

From such a point of view the Bashkir Shaman stands half way between Keats and Rilke on the one hand and St John of the Cross and St Augustine on the

other; the paradox, as we so often find, contains a deep and underlying truth.

"Unless ye become as little children . . ." What is it that the primitive bard possessed which has been lost, or even deliberately discarded, by the developed poet?

It is the sense of sin, the need for and the means towards redemption. The primitive conception of the mantic, however inchoate and confused, implies the recognition of something wrong, some need for restoration and salvation. The mantic poet is a healer and mediator through whom the salvific power of God may be both revealed and communicated to those who are united with Him. We should not let bizarrerie of expression blind us to the reality of this recognition. The Bashkir Shaman may appear to us grotesque because his ritual dress of fur and feathers offends our religious sense, but it is an elementary mistake to let such extraneous factors bound our vision.

There is an embryo in the primitive seer, an apprehension of man's relation to God which can be recognized as foreshadowing the Christian doctrine of the Fall and Redemption, a feeling forward to more revelation, which we shall indeed find as recurrent in different stages of development in the non-Christian Mystery religions, but which, as civilization has progressed, has become increasingly separated from the specific function of the poet.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Parallels between Christian dogma and practice and primitive ritual have been vociferously pointed out by the adversaries of revealed religion, and it has been a commonplace to enlist anthropology in the campaign, on the strange but common supposition



This first most obvious division between the specialized poet and the primitive bard would draw the line of true development from the primitive seer to the mystic, leaving the poet as a divergent accidental type, but from another and perhaps deeper standpoint the principle of selection may be reversed.

While from one point of view we see the primitive seer, in contrast to the dilettante poet, as prophetic, as concerned to save, when we contrast him on the other hand with the more fully developed prophet or mystic we see as clearly the embryonic nature of his vision.

Compared with Baudelaire or Byron we see him as a means of regeneration, almost a moral force, but if instead we regard him in relation to Isaiah or St Paul he not only shrinks in stature but changes in nature, from prophet back to mere medicine-man.

On this basis the dividing line would run, no longer between the elementary and the advanced poet, but rather between two phases of the spell-binder on one side and the regenerating prophet on the other.

There is truth in either of these perspectives, for as in the original natural gift of vision, so in its still indeterminate expression, both elements are there, and in our visual selection we may discern and concentrate on either.

How far the primitive's sense of guilt is comparable

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that what is lowest must be truest; the magic formula of "nothing but". This impulse to reduce whatever we study to its most elementary origins, back from the whole to its component parts, is characteristic of the equalitarian state of mind; it is this emphasis which has dominated the usual studies of comparative religion, culminating in Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*; but the emphasis is arbitrary.

to the Christian sense of sin, how far his ritual cleansing from pollution may be accepted as a genuine presentiment of a true doctrine of regeneration is admittedly a contested issue. To consider these questions adequately would involve the study of the Mystery religions in all their later and fuller manifestations, in Orphism and the cult of Eleusis. A full and dispassionate comparison of these Greek Mysteries with the Hebrew prophets, from this point of view, would be of fascinating interest; it is impossible to attempt it here, but as in our other pairs of alternatives we may recognize here too both the duality and the distinction—two distinct elements in inward vision and the perpetual tension of their relation.

The Hebrew prophet may indeed stand out as the ideal apotheosis of the Bashkir Shaman, in that he still combines, in himself, both poet and mystic, but there can equally be little doubt as to the order of value in his own estimation of his two functions. The sophisticated poet, from this standpoint, manifests a flight from tension, the abandonment of a too exacting synthesis, and as always in escapism, the regression to a more primitive formality.

What in the mantic we may truly see as an embryonic sense of salvation may become in the post-Christian poet a reversion from regeneration back to magic.

In one sense all development implies further differentiation of function, all specialized perfection presupposes the sacrifice of an alternative. No artificial combination of dynamically divergent springs can restore a pristine unity that has been outgrown; but if the multiplicity of evolution is ultimately to be resolved into a

new and final one-ness there must be a harmony and right order in the separation and subdivision.

The poet as poet has his part to play, his own perfection to attain and contribute, but he cannot claim at the same time the abandoned character of prophet. The readiness of so many modern writers to act as moral or even religious leaders merely accentuates the distinction. It is not the utterance of moral judgements but his means of knowledge and the interior preparation for it that differentiates the prophet from the successful "literary man".

We have considered the poet in his most rudimentary form, in which the specifically poetic vision is least distinguishable from the religious, and ultimately it is the poetic genius, the great poet, who must be compared with the great mystic, but neither poet nor mystic is as a rule, in actual life, a pure type. Our study is in fact less concerned with human types as such than with the different forms of deeper vision itself.

It is the mystical element in poetic experience that we primarily need to compare with true religious mysticism, but before our final summing up of these two main forms of vision in depth, we should consider briefly some examples of the mystical element involved in other kinds of more than normal receptivity, neither truly poetic nor truly religious.

That there are "natural mystics" simply we have admitted; persons in whom an initial predisposition does not fulfil its latent promise, in either of the recognized directions, in whom a spiritual experience, genuine and even profound, does not result in any concrete work of art, nor yet in further religious apprehen-

sion. According to our thesis these cases are not, in terms of vision, fully developed; they are still indeterminate and incomplete, but they are significant, as showing the influence of passive vision outside the bounds of its more fully specialized expression.

The natural mystic, from this point of view, may express himself in almost countless forms; it is impossible and would be fruitless to attempt an exhaustive classification, but there are two particular examples which may be usefully considered since both, though very different in themselves, are more within the range of understanding of the "ordinary man" than is either the poet or the mystic. These are: the Lover and the Hero.

## VII

### *The Lover*

It is a platitude that being in love makes very ordinary people poets; it is, just while it lasts, a fleeting illumination, an evanescent waking into life of usually dormant faculties of perception. It is as generally noted that "Love is blind". The combination of these two facts of common experience is significant, for both are true, and the conjunction of an apparent blindness in some respects with increased vision in others suggests some access of interior perception which may be wholly alien to the usual consciousness of the lover. If we pursue the subject a little further we find that the whole question of love presents analogies to both the poetic and the religious experience. The lover, during his time of active loving, partakes, so it would seem, of both, but he is a very inexperienced poet and an

embryonic mystic, and as a rule his period of creative loving is too short for either potentiality to be developed.

We have seen that what evokes the aesthetic response, although we term it "beauty", cannot actually be equated with any formula of the beautiful. It is some elusive fleeting quality, or more likely some passing combination of qualities, potentiality as against perfection; we have also noticed the apparent disproportion between impression and reaction in the intuitive form of aesthetic response. Both these characteristics are as distinctive in the case of love.

That a given "beloved" is not lovable by any generally accepted standard is a commonplace too obvious to need emphasis; physical beauty is no explanation in the majority of cases, still less is moral worth. There seems no tangible proportion between objective personal value in the loved person and the intensity of love awakened. We must look further; and I believe we find the explanation, as in the specifically aesthetic response to beauty, in the intuitive perception of a reality behind appearance; in particular, in the case of love, of a potential completion.

There is implicit in the act of loving an acknowledgement of our own imperfection, and it is here that the lover, as such, approaches most closely to the mystic. The antithesis between love of God and human love, as it is often expressed, can be misleading, suggesting as it does inherent opposition, not only between wrong or inordinate love of creatures but any human love at all and love of God. In reaction to this too arbitrary separation we find a retaliatory denial of any difference at all between them; the familiar humanist levelling

down in which all love of God becomes merely, and nothing but, love of our neighbour, a love of man.

Over-simplification is, as always, not only inadequate, but deceiving, and as always the synthesis and dual vision demanded is difficult and costing to attain.

Even in the love of God itself there is admittedly an immense range of growth from the self-regarding to the disinterested, from selfish love of Him for our own sake to an ultimate love of Him for Himself, and a deeper insight in human love reveals an analogous complexity.

There is difference between love of God and human love, however divinized and transmuted. The cup of cold water given in our Lord's name is different fundamentally, and in essence, from the cup given in natural kindness only, and if we lose sight of this central truth the foundation of all our values is undermined, but there is no hard and fast dividing line between the countless stages and gradations through which the first sense of personal incompleteness, the hunger of the merely earthly Eros, may pass, changing not only from flesh into spirit, but from grasping to self-giving, not only from an earthly to a heavenly Eros but to a redemption of both in Agape.

So-called "romantic" love expresses in many ways the epitome of the "erotic", yet even here there can be, intrinsic to its very desiring, a self-giving; there can be a sense of death in love and love in death, not understood, not fully accepted, but unintelligently suffered, which as in the mantic and the non-Christian Mysteries, foreshadows the accepted love of sacrifice, and the ecstatic moment of giving, not only *to* but *for* another, is on the border at least of something more.

The lover at this point must choose between his translation into a higher state, the "dying into life" of Keats, or of reversion to a lower. His state as lover is essentially transient, leading up either to its own supersession or to disillusion and rejection. He can discard his love as separate and extrinsic, and free himself from its further implications either by violence or by inertia, or he can from this moment onwards take it into the texture of his being in a new way and let it be transformed, and let himself, in turn, be transformed by it.

What he cannot do is to remain static.

The proverbial blindness of the lover has also a direct bearing on the whole question of vision in depth; it may be of two wholly different kinds.

In the first place it may be parallel to that of the unobservant poet who seeming unaware of his surroundings yet draws from them an inner inspiration. The lover in this case is unaware of the obvious imperfections of his beloved because for the moment he is not interested; some other quite real but less obvious quality has caught, and is absorbing, his attention. In this case, as with the poet, the apparent disproportion between the obvious impact and his response to it is not due to failure in discrimination. The apprehension and its re-expression are on a deeper, more interior, level, sound and creative.

But the more usual association of the idea of the lover's blindness is in the idealization of the beloved characteristic of romantic love. This is a wholly different process, analogous to the self-projection of the idealist in other fields.

In this case the lover so far from claiming that his

beloved "though black is comely" simply reiterates that she is not black; it is an extremely common illustration of the usual process of idealization in which our own image is projected into a reality we shrink from.

The true expression of the lover's vision is in his love, his giving of himself, but in idealization of his beloved he is transferring the embodiment of his creation from himself to her; instead of himself, the person of his beloved becomes the medium in which he endeavours to incarnate his ideal image; and this presents innumerable difficulties, for it is not in his power to mould another living personality as the artist moulds his inanimate material, or the mystic his own nature.

It is recognized that the artist must have an understanding of his medium if he is to use it adequately, and in the same way the mystic must have an understanding of his own nature; this means that the matter in which the spiritual vision is to be embodied must be willing matter, adapted to receive the incoming spirit.

For the idealizing lover there is a constant danger that the medium he has selected may reject the role allotted to it, that it will refuse to serve as the vehicle of his idea. He is unused to the creative process in which he is temporarily involved, and he is an inexpert craftsman; drunk with his unaccustomed vision, he is too little receptive to the material that he is trying to use.

This is often the explanation of faithlessness.

"She is not what at first I thought she was!" should rather be:

"This material is recalcitrant; it will not express my ideal image!"

Uncertainty and frustration is inherent in romantic



love, although there can be forms in which an almost obsessive idealization prevails against all impacts of reality. Here, so far from a deeper vision, we have the real blindness inseparable from all idealization. It is once more in an acute example the familiar substitution of "what I would wish to be" for "what is".

It is unfortunate that this type of human love is, through a poetic convention, regarded so generally as the highest type, whereas it should be at most a transient phase, leading on for fulfilment to its own transformation.

The idealism of romantic love has been in fact itself so sentimentally idealized that its real significance has been missed.

In M. de Rougemont's interesting study, *L'amour et l'Occident*, he traces the historical connection between the rise of the mediaeval Troubadours and the former centres of Albigensian heresy; for him it is the Manichean flight from life, the love of death, which is its determining characteristic.

Some element of escape and flight is indeed implicit in all forms of idealism since the impulse to idealize presupposes non-acceptance of reality, but in idealizing love other elements are also involved.

It is, for instance, pre-eminently the expression of a tragic humanism, an Eros religion wanting Agape, and M. de Rougemont's condemnation hardly allows for the redeemable in Eros. The examples that he cites of "fatal" love, or love of death, can with but little change of emphasis be seen rather as the victory of love *through* death, the unrecognized beginnings of the apprehension of life *in* death.

In this element, indeed, there is the seed of the final reversal and transformation which, as we have already indicated, should be the further phase of love in depth.

It is rather, then, in the idealization itself that we shall find its determining characteristic, and the importance here is of two kinds; not only in the element of escapism, but also the impulse to idolatry, to false worship, which is inseparable from any form of extreme idealization.

In all idealizing love the beloved person becomes an object not of love merely but of adoration; a substitute, in greater or less degree, for a God that in some way we shrink from. It is essentially the substitution of our own creation, something we feel to be within our power, our own, for what is other, greater than ourselves, out of our power.

The giving of the romantic lover to the projected object of his worship in fact implies the fear of a real giving of himself to God.

When the idealizing love is focused upon a truly ideal person, a saint or hero, it may indeed become no obstacle but a means through which the ultimate worship is translated, but in the usual example of purely human romanticism the adoration which belongs to God is centred not on a mediator but on an unreal deceptive fantasy.

The impulse to idealize the loved object expresses also, in another less obvious way, the humanist substitution of man for God; not only do we erect a human idol as a substitute object of worship, but we ourselves in doing so usurp the place of God conferring grace. As God in giving grace has raised to glory what, in itself,

is unworthy of glory so we endeavour to make worthy of adoration what is intrinsically unworthy by our grace-substitute of idealization. The difference of direction, upwards as against downwards, and the unreality of the gift bestowed are symptomatic of the entire process of idealization.

Idealism is in any case, and as it stands, the expression of an aspiring humanism, the raising up of man as man into an object of worship; in comparison with this the first form of love-blindness at least reflects the Christian charity which sees and loves, unseen by others, Christ in the sinner.

The change from romanticism to realism in any personal relation is usually envisaged as disillusionment, the bursting of a bubble, the descent from poetry to prose, and too often as it takes place it is so; too often the revulsion which is bound to come when an ever encroaching reality can no longer by any *tour de force* be reconciled with the ideal image, leads to an embittered rejection of all worship; the abandonment of a false ideal leads to the repudiation of all ideals; but this is decadence and defeatism.

The change of vision which is in fact demanded so far from meaning the abandonment of too high an effort needs, on the contrary, its intensification; a more difficult and more demanding love, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding; it is to exchange illusion for true vision, shadow for substance.

Once more it is a question of dual vision; instead of the unreal reduction of what is complex and unequal to a false homogeneity it is the courage to perceive, and to accept, the tension of the lovable in the unlovely, the

noble in the mean, the divine in the human. Not the divine man, myself projected, which I have fixed my false devotion upon, but the far more exacting apprehension of God incarnate, latent, in the imperfect creature that I love. Once more the reality of grace.<sup>1</sup>

## VIII

*The Hero*

The question of idealization is closely related to hero-worship, and this brings us to our second intermediate type, the hero. The subject of the heroic has suffered particularly from the distortion of a loose common speech. As the terms are used, there is a significant distinction between the ideas of hero and hero-worship on the one hand and heroism and heroic on the other, the first suggesting romantic idealism, the second courage, particularly in the sense of endurance.

Clearly in origin there is no difference between the conception of the hero himself and the quality that he embodies, it is the association of "worship" here that has obscured the significance of the hero.

A true appreciation of the heroic is, I would suggest, as essential a test of vision in the natural order as is humility in the supernatural; they are in fact complementary; in other words the hero, rightly conceived, is the natural counterpart of the saint.

The various hero-substitutes with which the popular mind is led astray should not delay us; from the latest

<sup>1</sup> The practical necessity of this duality is stressed in the psychologists' insistence on non-identification; it is of course explicit in Christian dogma.

film-star to the Nazi leader they bear no closer relation to the real hero than does the magazine supplement to beauty.

In each case a real need of human nature, the need for beauty and for the heroic, is being exploited and thereby debased.

The essence of the hero is an expression of virtue, in whatever terms "virtue" is apprehended, beyond the attainment of the average man, but not beyond the compass of his perception, but there is in the character of this virtue an element of the poetic, of beauty, it is never merely pre-eminent respectability.

The hero, like the poet, is receptive to the impact of a perceived beauty, but he re-expresses what he has seen not in the medium of words or shape or colour but in his actions (to that extent he approaches more nearly to the mystic). The heroic is *aesthetic* action as distinct from what is merely "good", and the response that we experience in contact with the heroic is essentially aesthetic.

The element of paradox, of dialectic, of the apparently impossible, which we have recognized in all deeper vision, is a marked feature of the heroic. Unlike the "just war" the "heroic battle" is always against overwhelming odds. Although in certain primitive instances the hero is pictured as a victor, defeating enemies or adverse circumstances against all reasonable expectations, his epitome is reached in the conception of victory in defeat, intrinsically, spiritual victory in and through material defeat . . . triumph through death.

The death of Leonidas at Thermopylae fighting a fight in which there was no hope, no possibility of

material success, is a complete expression of the heroic. The contrast between material and spiritual is explicit; it is a spiritual victory in face of which defeat and suffering and death are nothing.

This emphasis on spirit as against matter is so much the motive power of the hero that it could almost be expressed in St Paul's words:

"Every one that striveth for the mastery, refraineth himself from all things. And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that in many forms of heroic action, especially in the case of physical courage, the spiritual crown is seen in terms of concrete personal glory, a fame that will outlast the hero's life but is still a personal acquisition; in heroism, as in all other human actions, motives are seldom pure; it remains that the specifically heroic implies a sacrifice of matter to spirit, of self to other than self, or, in its least exalted forms, of a lower to a higher conception of self.

In this, as in the case of tragic love in death, we are brought close to the sacrificial giving of the mystic. It is a foreshadowing, an apprehension of something not yet grasped or understood.

The sacrificial essence of heroism is recognized in the condition of "heroic sanctity" as a qualification for the canonization of a saint.

The hero, then, rightly appreciated, is the natural counterpart of the saint, but as he stands, however heroic, he is not the saint.

As one form of natural mystic he does approximate

<sup>1</sup> I Corinthians ix. 25.

to the real mystic; in so far as he incorporates his vision in his own actions he does in a sense embody them in himself, and by so doing there is a change in the texture of his own being, but the typically heroic act tends to become itself a work of art; it is extrinsic, and can be completed as a thing in itself apart from the transformation of the hero. The inner transformation of the hero is not, itself, the essence of his expression, it is incidental and at most partial.

As with the natural mystic in general his experience and its re-expression is aesthetic and not sanctifying. Although the medium of his aesthetic vision is primarily moral, beauty of behaviour and character rather than form, he is not necessarily, *as hero*, aware of holiness.

As hero he is still self-active, a super-normal development of the purely human; as hero he is the superman, the ideal man. If he is to attain the transformation from the merely heroic to heroic sanctity he must first give up his own achievement, or rather re-enact it in a new dimension. In a sense beyond his present conception he must lose his life to find it, die to live. Instead of demigod in his own right he must become a vehicle for Divine power outside his own control, apart from as well as in him. It must be no longer for him: "What can I do?"—but "What can be done with me?"

## IX

### *The Primordial Image*

In taking the poets and mystics as examples of passive knowledge we have admittedly focused our attention upon two highly specialized types of mind, the mystic,

regarded merely naturally, carrying to a yet more advanced stage the receptivity of the poet. The hero is, by his lowest definition, outstanding, above the average level, while the lover, though ordinary enough at other times, is in the moment of his loving raised to a higher than average pitch of consciousness.

The examples we have been considering are, in fact, all to some extent distinguished from the average run of men, and all, in varying degrees, distinguished by the same kind of peculiarity, by some unusual quality of perception. All that is so far shown, it may be urged, is that a certain parallel exists between different versions of the same fundamental peculiarity. If this were indeed all we should be little further in our advocacy of passivity as a way of knowledge for all men; but at this point we find our claim supported from an unexpected quarter, that most modern form of science, analytical psychology.

In general, as we have noted, scientific observation demands an increase of surface observation, the horizontal increase of vision in breadth associated with more active seeing, and as a consequence the scientific mind tends to be hostile to the various forms of passive knowledge; it is therefore all the more valuable to find that this very external observation of the working of the average mind has led these distinguished men of science full cycle from their own basis. Through their technical observation as scientists the psychologists have been led to recognize the validity of receptive knowledge.

There are, as is well known, strong differences of opinion between the different schools of psychology; the Freudian Old Guard denies with fury the conclu-



sions of Dr Jung, and it is Dr Jung's testimony that concerns us in its far more explicit bearing on the nature and value of passive knowledge. Yet even in the theories of Freud the first beginnings of its recognition are to be found.

Even the sinister subconscious with which the Freudians would terrify us implies a certain inverted recognition of passive knowledge, but it has remained for Dr Jung to rid the idea of knowledge in depth from its misleading associations and to realize the vast implications of a fuller acceptance of a passive knowledge independent of our own repressions.

"The Unconscious is mother of consciousness . . . The conscious mind is based upon, and results from, an unconscious psyche, which is prior to consciousness and continues to function together with, or despite, consciousness . . . The Unconscious as a whole is far from being a relic of consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

Dr Jung has been convinced, largely in face of his own preconceptions, that through the unconscious mind we have access to a new level of reality; so far from being, as was originally supposed, the receiving centre for a repressed pathological libido it has become for him a still uncharted region of creative knowledge of a new kind.

"The inner voice is the voice of a fuller life, of a wider, more comprehensive consciousness. That is why in mythology, the birth of the hero, or the symbolic re-birth, coincides with sun-rise: the development of personality is synonymous with an increase of awareness."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Integration of Personality*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

This undoubtedly corresponds to the passive way of knowledge of which the poets and mystics have been speaking.

For Dr Jung, then, to his own surprise, the horizontal way of active knowledge leads to its own apparent contradiction; the Modern Man whose sickness is his problem is, he finds, sick through the loss of his soul, and he can only find what he has lost through the deliberate cultivation of his atrophied receptive powers. Not as a poet but as a man of science and a physician Dr Jung reinforces our position.

It is not only on the general thesis of the value of receptive knowledge that Dr Jung's work supports us. The material of his observation is in itself significant.

Whereas for Freud the contents of our dreams reveal, in symbol, our repressed desires, for Jung the symbolism of dreams is incalculably more profound; he has discovered in the dreams of ordinary modern people the symbols of the Myths of all the ages.

This concept of the Primordial mental Image is illuminating in any such inquiry as the present. In this we see that as an established fact the imagery of the poet and mystic is not confined to the exceptional mind. For Jung it is the language of the Unconscious, of the creative Collective Unconscious, from which all poetry and all religion spring; so far and no further will he venture, but for us who claim to have access to a yet deeper and more certain knowledge he has furnished a precious testimony. For him the Primordial Images of mankind still represent the product of the Unconscious, but it is equally possible to see them as images of a

reality outside and independent of our minds, symbols of ultimate objective truth.

The mystic says: "Empty the mind of all discursive thinking; await in quiet God's action on the soul and you may receive the grace of union."

The poet says: "Leave me in solitude and peace and the Muse will inspire me; I will create."

Dr Jung says: "Discard the inhibition of conscious thought, release the receptive powers of the psyche, and the archetypes of the Unconscious will be set free; your personality will be integrated."

The explanation offered in each case depends upon the standpoint of the speaker, but who can question that the procedure and in some measure the ensuing experience are akin? It is the mantic's entry into himself, but Dr Jung prescribes it for the average Western man-of-action, the business man, the intellectual, as the remedy for his neurosis.

In all these different methods of approach the principle of action is the same; a clearing of the mind and the attention from the distractions of active thought, a preparing of the ground for a new impact, for some power outside and above and at the same time deep within us—the prepositions are interchangeable—to come down, in, up, out—and take possession of us. It is implicit in such preparation that this "other" source of knowledge is recognized as of higher value, the need for it to transcend and supersede our individual activity is acknowledged; we find, moreover, that in each case the desire for it increases in proportion to the practice of a preparatory technique.

There is then, from our three different angles,

unanimous agreement as to the value of the passive knowledge all aspire to; each, from his different standpoint, is convinced that he makes contact in this way with a reality of supreme importance, and each, in his different medium, re-expresses what he has seen in terms of imagery.

When Keats writes of Titans and the Muses, of magic casements and immortal pards, there is a tendency to discount his message as a poetical conceit. When St John of the Cross speaks of the dark caverns and the lamps and St Teresa of the fountain, the average modern mind dismisses the immediate content of what they tell us<sup>1</sup> as a remote and unreal fantasy, but now we are assured by Dr Jung, as the result of thirty years' observation on several thousand patients, that these same images are in fact used unconsciously by ordinary unimaginative people as the expression of an apprehension beyond their own control or understanding.

These images and symbols are, it seems, the forms in which the human mind endeavours to give expression to what it has received of knowledge in depth, a knowledge which of its nature and in essence is inexpressible in direct speech.

Birth and rebirth, death and resurrection, water of life and of regeneration, the trees of life and of know-

<sup>1</sup> In a most appreciative reference to St Teresa, as "mantic", Mrs Chadwick still takes for granted that her ideas are unintelligible to modern minds.

"One of the greatest difficulties which one has to try to overcome in reading the writings of St Teresa and of the other mediaeval mystics, is that of really understanding what she is talking about . . . The familiar words and formulae are symbols for unfamiliar ideas." (Op. cit., p. 70.)

ledge, sin and salvation—these are the themes, so Dr Jung has found, that occupy the unconscious minds of people who are not in their conscious waking lives either poetical or religious, and these themes they express, so he discovers, in the traditional imagery of the religious Myth, a symbolism which appears at first sight quite disconnected from their conscious thought.

From such a standpoint all mythology and even the higher forms of religious expression are seen as different attempts to externalize, and give form to, these primitive truths of the Unconscious.

The wheel of speculation comes full circle: from Dr Frazer and *The Golden Bough* to Dr Jung and *The Primordial Image*.

For Dr Frazer and his school the key to all religion must be sought in material conditions; for him the idea of death and resurrection consists in an enactment of the seasons, the need for a rebirth and for redemption is, as he sees it, "sympathetic magic" by which the primitive mind seeks to ensure the rebirth of the year.

The *eniautos daimon*, the Saviour, familiar in Mystery religions, is thus a projection of the Year God on whose rebirth the harvest will depend. This well-known attitude, which must transpose all that is spiritual to material terms, which must reduce all that is complex to its elemental parts, is the characteristic approach of rationalism to anything beyond the reach of reason.

What is of special interest in Dr Jung's reversal of this scientific process is, that although he does avowedly attack the problem from the opposite pole, from the spiritual standpoint, he does not, and cannot in the nature of things, deny the material reality which is for

Dr Frazer all existence: he includes it. According to the materialist, because the seasons and the night and day are real, because the leaves do fall in Autumn and the new growth rises in the Spring, all spiritual life and concepts in which a similar rhythm is detected must be explained away as a projection from the material facts.

For Dr Jung there can be no equivalent temptation to deny the reality of the seasons, or of the night and day, darkness and light; he does not say "There is no death and resurrection of the year, no going down and re-rising of the sun"; what he does say, and this is most important, is that these outer circumstances of life would not exert such dominion over the human spirit as they do unless they were related very closely to our own inner experience. It is because they do in fact provide symbolic expression for our spiritual life that these primordial images are so universally employed.

"All the mythologized occurrences of nature, such as Summer and Winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy season and so forth, are anything but allegories of these same objective experiences, nor are they to be understood as 'explanations' of sunrise, sunset, and the rest of the natural phenomena. They are rather symbolic expressions for the inner and unconscious psychic drama that becomes accessible to human consciousness by way of projection, that is, mirrored in the events of nature."<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this distinction is great; it brings us back from quite a different angle to the duality of truth.

Something can be true in two ways, in two media, at

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 55.

the same time; it does not cease to be true on the surface because it is true at a deep level also; it does not cease to be true in time and space because it is true in the world of the spirit.

In primitive man, in classical antiquity, in ancient China, in India, in the Norse sagas, in the dreams of modern Western dreamers, the same spiritual history is expressed in the same imagery, and the images are, as all such symbols must be, likenesses from the world of actual things.

Because the leaves do fall and new leaves grow, because the year does die and rise again, so we enact it in our mystery cult, but as in itself symbolic. The death and resurrection of the *eniautos daimon*, his rising in the spring, our sharing in his *mana*, are seen in layer after layer of meaning as the re-enactment of what is.

## X

### *Apparent Contradiction*

Dr Jung simply states his observations; he is reluctant to draw the conclusions to which his own statements seem to lead. For him the Archetype, the Primordial Image, remains apparently a traditional thought-form in which the collective Unconscious of mankind expresses a common spiritual experience.

It is allowable for us to go further; from our point of view it represents an unconscious apprehension of reality, perhaps rejected by the conscious mind. Already in Dr Jung's own estimation the Collective Unconscious stands for a non-rational way of knowledge, that is higher, not lower, than the purely conscious; we

may see it rather as the means by which the objective truth outside makes impact on us, through our often resistant active minds.

Viewed in this light the symbols of the Unconscious are seen as reflections and, as it were, reincarnations of truth inherent in the whole creation. The sceptic dreaming of the Tree of Life, of the Waters of Baptism and Regeneration, is testifying against his own assertion. The mystic's esoteric vision is confirmed by the unconscious witness of mankind.

In this connection it is interesting to consider the meaning of the psychological "complex" which has become a commonplace of speech. This is defined as "An association of repressed ideas, fused together by a common emotional tone"—and an inexplicable sense of tension is regarded as its most characteristic symptom.

In this description the emotional tension may be attributable to some personal maladjustment, to a "trauma" with which the psychologist may deal, but in itself the "complex" presents a curiously close parallel to the emotional tension of the poet, and even to the suffering of the mystic, the sudden touching of a point of pain, inexplicable on the surface, and an emotional reaction, immediate and out of all relation to the obvious occasion. The word spoken, the subject raised, the scent, the colour, are calculated to arouse a certain moderate emotional response; there may be known associations which will explain a certain degree of painful disturbance, but the pain we do in fact experience is quite beyond any such rational explanation; we are "lamed", wounded, struck to the heart, by some much deeper implication which the apparent impact



serves to conceal and which we ourselves may be quite at a loss to understand.

In the morbid complex there is failure to achieve the deeper synthesis; the tension is static, paralysing, not creative, but the characteristic crippling pain, unpredictable and incalculable, presents an almost disconcerting likeness to the poignancy of poetic vision, or even to the suffering of the mystic, only without the simultaneous joy.

There has been involuntary contact with some unacknowledged deeper truth, some fleeting, terrifying awareness of the nature of reality instantaneously rejected. The difference involved is vital; the suffering of the neurotic, so far from being creative, is destructive, yet even his experience may contribute something to our knowledge of the reality he is rejecting.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be accidental that approach to deeper vision, from whatever angle, should so generally produce this painful tension. If once we are convinced of the existence of a spiritual reality outside ourselves, and of our own potential contact with it, the obvious explanation of this tension must be looked for in the nature of that deep, unknown reality. I suggest that it is some recognition, however incomplete, unformulated, and inchoate, of the elemental dialectic, the mystery at the heart of truth, that calls forth this poignant emotion.

From whatever angle we approach it, in whatever

<sup>1</sup> Dr Jung indeed claims a potential creative value for the neurotic complex in itself: "It means that something incompatible, unassimilable, and conflicting exists—perhaps as an obstacle, but also as a stimulus to greater effort, and so perhaps as an opening to new possibilities of achievement."

(*Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 91.)

medium, when once our eyes are opened to its existence, we find this element of tension, of the apparently impossible as the dynamic centre of our search; so true is this, so inescapable, that its absence should be taken as a warning signal; it is by their non-fitting our pieces fit.

The recognition of this principle is an essential step in any attempt at deeper understanding; it is a first realization of the complexity of truth, the simultaneous seeing in two dimensions which any increase of passive vision involves.

The argument *ad hoc* is admittedly unsatisfactory, yet the appeal to experience, to "what happens", must be of some value rightly used.

The rational character of the human mind is so often proclaimed that it is necessary to stress also at times the instinctive emotional response to a perception of the paradox.

"A thing cannot be and not be at the same time under the same aspect". That we know, yet we know also, if we dare to admit it, that there is a sense in which the emphatic statement that a thing *apparently* is and is not at the same time, something which seems at first sight impossible—can rouse an immediate response as though it were an intuitive recognition of a hidden truth of greater import.

The famous formula of Tertullian, *Credo quia impossibile*, has been persistently attacked, but rightly understood surely it may stand as an attempt to express forcibly this deep spiritual truth; "impossible" in such a context clearly assumes a qualifying adverb, "apparently", or "at first sight", and recognition of this

same principle is implicit in Newman's description of a "mystery" as "a statement of the inconceivable", or "a proposition conveying incompatible notions".

That the emotional response to the "apparently impossible" is natural and not sophisticated is shown by the reaction of children to a first contact with those "mysteries of faith" in which the supra-rational tension is strongest.

An instance of this fact is afforded by the case of a particular child, brought up in enlightened free-thinking surroundings, receiving no religious instruction of any kind, who at the age of ten, by chance, discovered the Athanasian Creed; the effect upon her was dynamic. The impression, so far as she could put it into words was the discovery of a new world, of some tremendous and exciting truth to which so far she had not had any access, but which she recognized as of immense importance.

The phrase which afterwards haunted her mind (for it was in the Anglican version she had found it) was "not three incomprehensibles, but one incomprehensible". These words thrilled her, not, she maintained, as merely rhythmic magic, but with the sense of overpowering truth, of revelation. Something in the child's mind, unschooled and unprepared, responded with delighted affirmation to what is commonly regarded as an abstruse and crabbed dogmatism,<sup>1</sup> and this impression was lasting.

This episode does not of course substantiate the

<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of Transubstantiation presented to this child in the course of a history lesson (by a kind Presbyterian governess) evoked a like immediate acceptance.

claims made by the Athanasian Creed, but it does show that this kind of statement of an inexpressible idea in terms of apparent contradiction relates to an instinctive need in the quite unsophisticated mind.

This is admittedly a "pragmatic proof", but since the tendency to discard such elements of controversy is almost always based on "human needs", on what "the modern mind demands", and so forth, it is permissible to point out that human minds, equally modern and without previous bias, do in fact, "need" what is being discarded.

These mysteries beyond the reach of reason would not have kept the hold they have on human minds, despite all superficial scepticism, unless they did both correspond to and express the inner nature of reality; unless, moreover, the truth that they express itself evokes a perhaps involuntary recognition.

Truth is not dependent on belief, error does not in course of time cease to be error because the majority support it, yet there is a certain sense in holding that a material objective truth is established by common consent; the man is usually there if everybody sees him.

In the present connection the striking parallels which we have found between the conscious experience of the poet and mystic and the unconscious dreaming of the average man suggests very strongly an actual objective cause common to these three different types of mind. Some real thing happens to these real people, and what happens relates to some profound need of their nature. In the case of the poet and the mystic this is, in differing degrees, acknowledged, in the case of the average man

it is not: for him the world of myth and symbol which takes possession of him in his sleep is, in his waking moments, repudiated. This makes the testimony of Dr Jung of particular importance to us, the more perhaps because it is so guarded.

Something is there, something of importance really happens, and it is vital to man's well-being to realize this. So far we have the support of the psychologist.

The poet, for his part, acknowledges that he is at the mercy of inspiration; something of ultimate reality, of the nature of things, of the invisible world of ideas, call it what he will, has made its impact on him.

He has been struck with "pity and terror", with *lacrimae rerum*, with an intensity of beauty that has transported him out of himself. Something outside himself has in some way possessed him and he has "prophesied".

But neither psychologist nor poet can give an adequate explanation of what it is that has happened, still less can the lover or the hero.

So far, it seems, they go and then stop short. It is as though each, in his own way, was led up a high mountain and there he finds himself at the edge of a crag, a precipice below and clouds above, and the path he has followed up till now leads to the edge of the sheer cliff on which he stands; if he goes forward it is into space.

Something would impel him to jump, to shut his eyes and take the leap, forwards and upwards into the dark cloud, and through the cloud, perhaps, into new

light; but will he do it? If he does he will be no longer the plain dreamer, nor the plain poet, but the mystic. Of our "types" it is the mystic only whose vision and experience have penetrated into a further world of deeper knowledge; for him the perceptions of his passive vision so far from being fragmentary and perplexing glimpses of an unconceived existence are parts of a recognized reality, parts of a unity in which he lives.

It is the mystic alone who has the key, not only to his particular illumination but to what they experience in common; he alone knows what it is that is happening, not only to himself but also, in their differing degrees, to his part-way companions.

We may say indeed that as religious mystic, he begins where the poet in all his forms leaves off.

So far we have treated the poet and mystic as a class apart, as the two archetypes of passive vision, legitimately differentiated but still comparable on the same plane. The roots of mystical experience are, as Père Maréchal assures us,<sup>1</sup> deep in the psychological experiences of mankind, and this element of common nature is of very real importance, but to consider the full Christian mystic from this point of view alone is to ignore the dynamic secret of his being, his supernatural life, his life of faith. It is not what he has in common with the poet, nor yet with any form of natural mystic, but, on the contrary, what divides him from them that is his essential characteristic. However close the parallels we discern between the different forms of passive vision, in contrast to a non-receptive obtuseness, the

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics.*

ultimate dividing line must run between a vision that is still natural, however spiritual and supernormal, and vision that is supernatural.

## XI

*The Christian Mystic*

The essential note of mysticism as such, as distinct from aesthetic experience, is, as we have already postulated, the definite desire for some form of personal union with the object of our vision, some change in the texture of our own being in relation to what we contemplate; it is not merely to possess and use it, but rather to remain ourselves possessed.

Beyond this general cosmic unification there is, as it approaches the religious form, some measure of deliberate subjection of the personal will to the Divine Will; but Christians hold that supernatural grace, given through the Incarnation, so raises and transforms the Christian vision that it becomes a wholly different thing from the highest form of natural mysticism, a means of union with God, wholly unparalleled and unique, through a participation in His nature without loss of personality and identity.

According to the Christian view this vital ontological difference between Christian mysticism in its fullness and all other forms of natural vision, whether of natural religion, or poetic, so far transcends and supersedes the differences which we may discern empirically, that these sink into insignificance. That this is so must be obvious if once the idea of grace is apprehended, but this doctrine in itself presents great difficulties to the

non-Christian; the hard and fast distinction, as laid down, will appear arbitrary and artificial without the presupposed conditions on which the whole fabric of belief is founded.

In the next section we shall try to explore the implications of this essential doctrine, but in the meantime to complete our picture of the two prototypes of passive vision, in the same medium, we should review the full mystic empirically, as we have so far reviewed the poet, and in relation to him.

We cannot see the supernatural grace which distinguishes the Christian mystic, we cannot discern the limits of its working, but when we compare him with the poet, experientially, as we propose to do, by what happens or seems to happen to him, according to our human estimation, we shall recognize how intimately the differences we can recognize are both changed in meaning and illumined by acceptance of this doctrine.

What then are the outstanding differences between our prototypes, as we discern them, naturally and experientially?

The first outstanding difference between the poet and the religious mystic is in the medium of their re-expression. The poet re-expresses his inner vision in a concrete external work of art, extrinsic to himself, the mystic re-expresses what he has seen in his own life, in sanctity.

The second noticeable difference is in their relation to that vision itself, their attitude towards what they have seen.

The poet has, so we must infer, seen something of intoxicating value, something which arouses in him an intensity of feeling, an explosive tide of strange, half-



painful joy, that must break out in concrete re-expression, in sound or colour or form. He cannot as a rule fully explain what it is that he has thus seen or known, but in some form he must rid himself of it; he cannot rest until he is set free; his re-expression is in fact a *Katharsis* which leaves him in himself, unchanged, unpurified. When once he has thus re-embodied his vision he casts it from him; he is himself again, he is released.

What the mystic sees, on the other hand, provokes no such explosive re-expression, but it affects him profoundly in himself; he makes no movement to free himself from it, rather he absorbs it and lives upon it; through it he becomes different in himself, increasingly different as his vision deepens. He is himself its medium of re-expression, and it is integral to his position that he shall offer himself unflinchingly, flesh and spirit, to the impact and its re-expression, to be himself the wax, the clay, the stuff in which the idea is to be re-embodied.

If he should, like the poet, shrink from the suffering of his passive vision, if he should attempt to externalize his own experience, and escape from it, he may indeed become a poet, but as religious mystic he has failed.

According to modern Western standards the lives of many of the greatest mystics may appear curiously barren in good works as the term is interpreted to-day, since the conception of prayer as a good work is alien to the average modern mind, yet even supposing the life of contemplation to be a life ill-guided and mis-spent, it must be recognized that the genuine mystic is essentially concerned with what, according to his view, is goodness; it is in terms of sanctity that he both receives and re-expresses, and this again divides him from the

poet, who, as we have already remarked, is often curiously impervious to beauty of being or doing; to holiness.

It is true that mystical experience of a minor kind seems quite unrelated to holiness; the indeterminate predisposition of which true mysticism may make use is, as we have already emphasized, in itself morally indifferent, but with the great poet we must compare the great mystic; we are in fact now taking the Christian mystic as our example; he is without exception one in whom the "practise of the virtues" is carried to a very high degree, the poet, however great a poet, as such is not.

The "practice of the virtues" is indeed a factor which at this point we should dwell upon, since it exemplifies the co-inherence of activity and contemplation.

Increased passivity of mind is, as we have already emphasized, the first necessary preparation for any form of spiritual perception, but as in art, not only re-expression but even the necessarily selective vision demands an adequate technique, so for the mystic the passivity of pure contemplation must be preceded by an active ascetic preparation.

It should be unnecessary to re-emphasize that neither poetic genius in itself, nor yet, still less, and in a further sense, the supernatural vision of the mystic, is to be obtained by our own efforts; both are gifts, given or not given, as God pleases, but in each case, as in all states of life, we have it in our power to co-operate with or to impede His specific action in our regard.

Just as we shall not find ourselves great poets, whatever our potential endowment, without the active and

laborious work involved in technical proficiency, so we shall not become great mystics, however "spiritually gifted", without the exercise of will demanded by the practice of the virtues.

The idea of trying to learn and practise "goodness" as a technique of the "spiritual life", as a thing in itself, on which to concentrate attention, is wholly alien to the non-Christian, since it depends for its significance on an adequate conception of sanctity:—a state of being to be acquired *through* doing but essentially itself *being* not *doing*. The Christian idea of sanctity presupposes the whole religious structure of belief, in which all value of whatever kind must be a relation-to-God value.

It is the more necessary to stress this integral interdependence of asceticism and contemplation since in so many forms of neo-mysticism it is ignored or radically distorted.

A point of view for which all moral good consists in external social action too readily denies the mystic the medium in which alone he functions. Failing to recognize as "good" or even "active" an activity that is spiritual and inward it would unknowingly reduce him to his undifferentiated beginnings; again the movement back from saint to medicine man.

In this connection it is less surprising to find an exaggerated concentration on the more spectacular accompaniments of certain mystical conditions; psychic phenomena replacing sanctity as the characteristic of the mystic.

This is merely, in another form, the usual overvaluation of the external.

The sanctity which is inseparable from true mysti-

cism is, it must be clearly understood, neither assessed by output of good done nor advertised by miraculous exhibitions; it is an interior attitude of mind, the conformity of the will to God, through which the entire personality is itself gradually transformed into the likeness of what it looks at. Through the contemplation of God's holiness, it is holy. The holiness the mystic contemplates possesses him, it enters into him and makes him God-like, not by force of mere developing of his own nature but through a given sharing in the nature of God.

This union of the soul with God through transformation is the acknowledged end to which the life of contemplation leads; this is the work of art in which the Christian mystic will have embodied his vision, but—and here we touch the crucial difference between his vision and the poet's—this transformation depends upon the supernatural love of charity. To see God's holiness as the mystic sees it is only possible through grace, by which his human nature is raised up to a participation in God's nature.

And here once more we need a dual vision; such mystical experience must result in an increase of holiness in the mystic, but at the same time it would seem to depend on an initial holiness in him. "To him that hath shall be given." The movement is reciprocal, both end and beginning, a going forth from God and return to Him.

"This flowing forth of God always demands a flowing back, for God is a sea always that ebbs and flows, pouring without ceasing into the Beloved according to the need and the merit of each, and ebbing back again with all those who

have been endowed thus, both in Heaven and on earth, with all that they have and all that they are."<sup>1</sup>

This difference in mode and medium of expression between an aesthetic and religious response is clearly illustrated in daily life in the reaction to religious art. Against the claim so widely made to-day, that its full appreciation is in no sense dependent on belief, the case of art may in fact be cited in support of the quite opposite contention, providing in more ordinary terms a particularly clear example of the precise difference we have been discussing between aesthetic and religious perception. In a religious work of art there will be, if it is in any sense true art and truly religious, both the elements in both perception and expression. The sophisticated neo-Pagan whose aesthetic perception is well developed will undoubtedly respond to the aesthetic impact offered to him; he will discriminate more sensitively the excellence and the deficiency; he will appraise the technique of expression more accurately than will the less aesthetically developed Christian, but—and this he fails to realize—he will have wholly missed another impact which was at the same time being offered to him. Because of this he experiences no impulse to relate what he perceives to his own life, whereas the Christian listening to Bach's Passion music, if he is stirred at all by what he hears, is moved in proportionate degree to share the Passion; if he is stirred at all by the Spiritual Canticle he is moved to that extent at least to attempt Mount Carmel. Potentially as Christian he is the Christian mystic.

The first outstanding difference between the poet

<sup>1</sup> Ruysbroeck, *Spiritual Marriage*.

and mystic is then, so far as outward symptoms go, the difference in the medium (and mode) of expression, the second is in the personal relation towards the content of their vision; this second difference is, in fact, implicit in the first, but it shows itself in various ways. There is not only the difference between the attitude of *katharsis*—the putting aside and escaping from what is seen, which we have noted as intrinsic to artistic creation—and the incorporation of the mystic, but also striking difference in the personal relation to it and in the consequent humility which we have already recognized as the touchstone of all depth of vision.

The experience of the mystic invariably produces in him a sense of his own utter inadequacy, a conviction of wretchedness and unworthiness so overpowering in relation to the reality he apprehends that the suffering he undergoes is explicable by this alone. If the response of the mystic to his vision is, in essence, an increase of holiness in himself we may amplify that definition by saying that the more he sees the holier he becomes, but, as an integral part of the same process, the more he realizes the “nothingness” of his achievement.

In startling contrast to the humility of the mystic the arrogance of the poet is proverbial. There are of course exceptions to the rule,<sup>1</sup> but when they occur they are the more noticeable, and as a rule the creative artist is provokingly aware of himself as a superior being in

<sup>1</sup> Keats may be regarded as such an exception when he writes:  
“Though it may sound paradoxical; my greatest elevations  
of Soul leave me every time more humbled.”

(Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Oct. 1818.)

But it is Keats rather as mystic than as poet who expresses himself in this letter.

contrast to the hordes without his powers. What he sees in his moments of vision produces in him no sense of inferiority but seems rather a source of self-enhancement. It is true that in the field of his technique, in proportion to his own depth of vision, there will be a disparity between that vision and its re-expression and he may experience a proportionate humility in this regard but that belongs to what he puts apart; in himself, in relation to his surroundings, this sense of humbling disparity is absent. He still considers himself and his own value horizontally, in relation to other human beings, and not in terms of the spiritual reality with which he has been momentarily in contact. He is one of the few "chosen" who see, in contrast to the many who are blind.

Poetic experience as expressed does indeed often imply a sense of adoration, of being in relation to a whole far greater than the self, a desire for, and even attainment of, self-effacement, but this is in the first place of low tension, pathos and yearning as against a passionate intensity, and in the second it too is unrelated to the life and character of the poet himself. As poet the content of his vision is quite separate from his own inner nature; something to be escaped from and passed on.

Such differences would be inexplicable in response to the same vision.

If then we return once more to the question: How far are poetic and mystical experience fundamentally identical? we may answer categorically that though analogous they are not the same.

We may say that the poet, in his moment of vision,

has been in contact with God as expressed in His creation. He has in proportion to his depth of vision momentarily apprehended the nature of God as beauty, and he has received and re-expressed it. He has in virtue of the creative gift in which he embodies his idea in matter himself participated in God's creation; he is a channel, a means, through which the divine current passes, but he has not himself been altered by it.

The mystic on the other hand has been in contact with God as Holiness, and Holiness is the essence of His nature, so far as in this life we apprehend it, but, and here once again we are brought back to the essential difference in being, such an apprehension of God's nature may only be attained through charity, which in itself means supernatural grace. The inner transformation of the mystic is thus intrinsic to his vision.



### III

#### THE SUPERNATURAL

“And for what end all this? Surely not that a man should rest finally in the joy conceived by such fruition, nor merely to torture the soul by such a bitter desolation. Our supreme happiness is not receiving but loving; all these favours, therefore, and all these sufferings do end in this; namely, the accomplishment of this love in our souls, so that all our perfection consists in a state of love, and an entire conformity with the divine will.”

(Fr. Augustine Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, Sect. IV, Ch. VI).



## I

### *Faith and Grace*

What is it that distinguishes the real mystic's vision from the poet's?

It is faith.

Up to a certain point, as we have seen, his personal experiences are curiously like those of the poet. The temperamental idiosyncrasies may be identical, even the preliminary stages of deeper vision may be the same. He too knows the unity of his life with all life, he too sees the life of man in relation to the Cosmos, but for him that vision is only the beginning, for him the rhythm of creation is expressing not merely the nature of things but God's purpose, and beyond that, for him, the God who is manifest in all that is, and always, has revealed Himself specifically in quite a different way, in place and time, through a unique and divine revelation, and it is this which for him supplies the key to all his own dimly realized intuitions.

The images and symbols through which he too receives the ultimate truth are no unsubstantial fantasies, nor yet the unacknowledged stuff of dreams, they are the divinely inspired expression of just that truth behind appearance, which he, in common with the poet, senses; but he is not, as is the poet, at the mercy of his own intuitions; integral to his initial act of faith is the acceptance of authority in the transmission of

that revelation, and in the conformity of his symbolism to the definitions of Christian dogma he attains a new creative tension through which the whole vision is carried onward into another order of existence; the laws of nature have become for him the Laws of Life, not merely revelation of "what is", but the Way of Redemption.

He too experiences the tension of dual seeing, the seeming contradiction of multiple truth; it is for him, as it was for the poet, an unseizable inner vision; but for him it is not inexplicable. For him it is the essential manifestation of a Creator who is Himself both One and Three; for him, the entire universe of being is showing forth the Blessed Trinity.<sup>1</sup> He too experiences the contradiction of pain in joy, and life in death, but for him the tension, so far from being, as it is to the poet and to the lover, without meaning and intolerable, is the central symbol of salvation, the Cross through which the world was, and is, saved; and so it is through the whole scale of nature.

We have seen how each advance in passive vision is attained through an increase in tension, a new crisis of apparent conflict to be synthesized at a deeper level; in the tension between the extreme inward vision of the mystic and the external authority of the Church we find, not, as might have been expected, friction and deadlock but the creative synthesis of faith.

It is faith that distinguishes the mystic's vision from that of the poet; what, then, is faith?

<sup>1</sup> *Creatura mundi est quasi quidam liber in quo relucet, representatur et legitur Trinitas fabricatrix.*

(St Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 11.12.1.)

Faith is an act of the mind accepting truth; essentially the acceptance on trust of what is told us; reliance on the credibility of the witness. Faith is not vision, but it leads to vision, as death to life; it is the way, the means, but not the end. The act of faith implies surrender of the personal will, the personal power of sight, and though this act of surrender may be followed by an immense extension of our vision it is in itself an abnegation, the relinquishment of our claim to self-sufficiency.

It is the more necessary to stress this note of darkness, of not-seeing and not-knowing, since we are about to emphasize the unparalleled new vision implicit in the paradox of blind faith.

This dual character of light and darkness is illuminatingly expressed by St John of the Cross:

“Faith, according to the theologians, is a habit of the soul, certain and obscure. The reason why it is an obscure habit is that it makes us believe the truths of God which God Himself has revealed—truths surpassing the light of reason, and beyond the reach of all human understanding. Hence it is that the excessive light of the faith is obscure darkness to the soul, because it subdues that which is great, and destroys that which is little, as the light of the sun puts out all other lights so that they appear not, and subdues our power of vision . . .

“It is evident that faith is a dark night of the soul, and it is thus that it gives it light; the more it darkens the soul, the more it enlightens it. It is by darkening that it gives light, according to the words of the prophet, ‘If you will not believe’, that is, ‘if you do not make yourselves blind’, ‘you shall not understand’—that is, ‘you shall not have light, the high and supernatural knowledge.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, ch. 3.

So much for theological definition, but what does this "supernatural knowledge" mean in terms of ordinary life?

So far we have considered only the natural order and natural knowledge; a kind of knowledge, a kind of existence, attainable by the unaided human reason, acknowledged as real by all human minds. We may differ in many points about it; as to the relative value of different aspects, as to its scope and limits, as to its purpose and meaning, but apart from a very few eccentrics there is agreement as to the reality of nature.

By nature, it is important to emphasize, we do not mean the material world only, but the far larger and more difficult conception of the world of matter and spirit as accessible to our natural powers.

The reality of this natural order, including natural spirit as well as matter, and the validity of the natural knowledge of human reason is acknowledged by both Christian and non-believer, but for the non-believer this represents all being and all knowledge. The Christian on the other hand believes in a reality of another kind, the order of grace, which transcends and transforms natural being, and the validity of another knowledge, knowledge by faith, which transcends and illumines natural knowledge.

This conception of the supernatural is so integral to Christian thought that it is difficult for born Christians to envisage a mental outlook which excludes it, yet it is still more difficult to define it in terms transmissible to the non-believer.

"Grace is a supernatural gift, freely bestowed by God on

rational creatures, so that they may attain to eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

This will in fact convey no meaning to him, since he does not accept the suppositions which the definition takes for granted.

That God has freely given to fallen man the means to participate in His Divine nature to become through Christ a sharer in His sonship, can have no sense at all for those to whom God is Himself unreal, for whom the Incarnation is a fiction.

In the same way the idea of faith cannot be adequately conveyed in terms of “acceptance of authority” to those by whom that authority has been rejected.

These two gifts are, moreover, interdependent. Faith is the first indispensable condition through which a state of grace may be attained; without preliminary faith we cannot receive the further gifts of charity and supernatural vision, yet this first indispensable condition is, in itself, a gift, a “grace”.

It seems an impasse, since without grace we cannot hope to understand grace, and without faith we cannot know what faith is!

*Crede ut intelligas*, “Believe in order to understand,” yet the ability so to believe is in itself beyond our natural powers; . . . we come full circle; again we face the apparent contradiction, the clash of contraries which to the eye of faith reveals the truth.<sup>2</sup>

This question of the supernatural is a greater obstacle to mutual understanding between the Christian and

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Catechism.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen fidei facit videre esse credibilia ea quae creduntur. Sum. Theol., IIa, IIae, Q. 1, A. 4.*

the non-believer than is recognized by either party. Without some apprehension of its meaning the whole Christian position is of necessity quite unconvincing, a castle in the air, a fantasy without foundation in reality, and on the other hand the Christian as a rule so takes for granted a world of supernatural values that he fails to recognize the effects of his initial presuppositions. He does not realize to what extent the entire edifice of his dogmatic position, to him so rational and so water-tight, depends upon an assumption he has made because he has himself the gift of faith.

For the devout but uninstructed Christian his faith does so transform the natural faculties in their operation that it is difficult for him to separate them; to say: "so far my natural reason leads me, from thence I am dependent upon faith";<sup>1</sup> yet in his dealings with the non-believer he must attempt to see things as he sees them and this means to see them *without* faith.

The stairs which to himself ascend to Heaven so clearly, must be envisaged as breaking off short at a vast abyss. The pattern which for him in all his life is working out according to God's purpose, must be envisaged as dissociated, a thousand unconnected little pieces, an aimless dance of dust motes in the sun-beam.

"God, the beginning and end of all things, can certainly be known from created things by the natural light of human reason."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, precisely what the Theologian does seek to do, but such distinctions tend to be regarded as merely speculative and abstract, having little bearing on current life.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican Council, cap. 2.



But it is equally of faith to stress that such a knowledge of God as can be reached by the unaided reason is a most inadequate and imperfect knowledge, as compared with knowledge through faith and love. It is this Christian knowledge of God through love with which we are concerned in this discussion, since it is towards this kind of knowledge that any passive vision in depth must lead.

Just as the active knowledge of reason leads us towards the natural knowledge of God, inadequate and imperfect, but not false, so does the passive way of vision in depth lead us towards a natural desire for God unformulated and indefinite, but real. The ecstatic moment of the poet is, from this point of view, analogous to the natural theology of the metaphysician; so far and no further in each case will their unaided faculties lead them.

To the faith-illuminated Christian it seems incredible that they should stop short, that they seemingly do not perceive where their own way of knowledge has been leading. In his moment of vision the distinction between natural and supernatural is obliterated and forgotten. For him all reason and all intuition, all experience of living, all he is and does and suffers, has but one meaning and one explanation, the showing forth of God in His Creation.

*"Et sic patet quod totus mundus est sicut unum speculum plenum luminibus praesentantibus divinam sapientiam, et sicut carbo effundens lucem."*<sup>1</sup>

In this vision, he does not, and he cannot, make allowance for the illumination of his faith.

<sup>1</sup> St Bonaventure: *In Hexaemeron*, II, 27.

What happens, then, when we have faith? And above all how does what happens then relate to what happened before, to the common experience from which we start?

## II

*The Light of Faith*

In earlier chapters we have tried to show the extent to which our natural powers of deeper vision are susceptible of development, through an increased passivity on our part. We have tried to prove, firstly, that what we call "vision in depth" is of value; and secondly, that some measure of this increased receptivity is within the reach of every one; yet it remains true that on the natural level there is a very great disparity in temperamental sensitivity. The peculiar vision of the poet is in its very nature esoteric. The poet is necessarily specialized, he has his special function, but we are not all called upon to be poets.

There is always a principle of division, whether vertical or horizontal, dividing our particular field of vision from what adjoins it. And the increase of individual perception is, in itself, an isolating factor. The more intensely I myself perceive the more shall I find myself cut off, alone. There is indeed a sense in which the development of a natural deeper vision implies and must imply eclecticism.

Against the background of this realization it must be stressed that supernatural faith in a strange way carries on, yet at the same time reverses, this general principle of vision.

The Light of Faith increases in an unprecedented way our natural faculty of passive seeing, yet at the same time, and by the same process, it cuts across the natural divisions of personal temperament and tendency. We enter into a new category, we use, or rather are made use of by, a wholly different mode of perception in which the principle of eclecticism is overridden, and as it were enveloped, by an all-embracing oneness.

We find once more, as we are always finding, our principle of apparent contradiction; the unparalleled increase of vision in depth *at the same time* as an equivalent extension; the hitherto conflicting movements, vertical and horizontal, are in the act of faith fused and made one. What in the natural order had appeared contradictory and incompatible is now seen as, supernaturally, one.

This particular example of the transfiguration involved in seeing by the light of faith is illustrative of the entire process which we shall find to be effected in us, if, and when, we receive the gift of faith.

It is essentially an experience beyond expression in exact verbal forms; we must fall back upon analogy, upon the images and symbols in which throughout the history of thought the inexpressible has sought expression.

So far we have made use almost entirely of the imagery of vision. It should hardly be necessary to stress that any such concrete symbolism must be in itself inexact and insufficient; all that we say in any such connection assumes the conditional "as though". The apprehension with which we are concerned is essentially

supra-sensual; for Joan of Arc it took auditory form as "voices"; St John of the Cross tells us of "touches"; St Augustine speaks of "fragrance"; in the psalms we are told to "taste" God.

It is quite clear that all such imagery represents the same process of reduction; the attempt to embody in a sense impression a non-sensual perception.

Since it is always through some imagery that our minds apprehend and must transmit the incorporeal truth some process of this kind is necessary. We cannot apprehend, still less transmit, absolute truth entirely without concepts, for we cannot see God as He is, and it is important that we should understand this.

There is a tendency for metaphysicians to claim a higher status for their axiomatic expression of truth, on grounds of greater freedom from imagery, but they, in fact, are equally in bondage to the tyranny of language.

There comes a point, and in such matters as these it is soon reached, when almost every word we use becomes through its devastating inadequacy rather a source of further misapprehension. Beyond a certain point indeed our words must of necessity distort our meaning since what we would convey is of its essence beyond words.

Yet so long as we have minds, so long as language is our normal means of communication, we must keep trying to confine in words that which we know cannot be confined by them.

At such a point as this the mathematician escapes into the world of pure numbers; emancipated from the bonds of language he has recourse to a new world of

symbols intelligible to other mathematicians but meaningless to the uninitiated.

The effect that this produces on the non-mathematical reader is curious and I think enlightening.

Read for example the articles by Professor Einstein in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; they endeavour to expound in words a mathematical reality; so far our ordinary understanding enables us to follow the process of his thought; it is an effort, but we can follow; then suddenly, at the climax of his reasoning, the limitation of words is discarded and he illustrates his meaning by a complicated hieroglyph.

To those who have the master-word, no doubt this figure is illuminating, it transcends our discursive reason, it symbolizes an immediate truth, yet to the uninstructed reader there is a complete breaking off of contact; we have no part in this, no key to the cipher, just as we were beginning to understand him he has plunged off into another dimension. Why could he not have been content with words?

There is an analogy between the seemingly very different worlds of mathematics and religious faith in that in both the truth to be expressed transcends the power of words to an extent which will and must break through the bonds of language, which will and must attempt its own expression in a new language of symbol and image.

The language of mathematical symbolism is, admittedly, a deliberate product, arrived at by a rational process, whereas religious imagery is largely an unconscious outcome of receptive knowledge, a passively acquired language unsought for, undeliberate, often

most incompletely realized. One is a chosen medium for the few, the other is equally intelligible to the most highly chosen and to the simple.

It is the supreme value of passive knowledge that it enables us to penetrate beyond the barrier of language, and of the thought-forms that are conditioned by it, into the world of wordless imagery in which the reality of the Divine Things can make an unimpeded impact on us.

“Hierotheus was taught not only by learning but by *undergoing* Divine things.”<sup>1</sup>

### III

#### *The Lens*

We have seen in our previous examples that the different forms of natural vision supplement each other. They are parts of a whole, each incomplete, and none can claim in itself to include the others.

Knowledge by faith does make this claim; the claim is indeed implicit in its existence.

We may deny the reality of the supernatural, whether of being or knowing, of grace or faith; we may regard the whole conception which the idea of grace presupposes as fantasy, as either wish-fulfilment or as the vestige of some primitive mythology, but it is impossible to admit the fundamental idea itself as real, and then try to deny its consequences.

If it is true that God exists, and that He does reveal His truth to men by specially appointed means beyond the ordinary scope of reason, such direct revelation must

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius, *de Div. Nom.*, cap. II.

inevitably transcend and supersede all other knowledge; it must, moreover, once we have access to it, operate retrospectively on all that we have come to know by natural reason.

When we are listening to an unknown language we do not hear the words as separate; the impression made upon us is one of unarticulated sound, but when once we have learned that language we can no longer hear it in the same way; whether we will or not our now enlightened hearing divides what we are hearing into distinct words; we cannot remember what it was like to hear that language without understanding, yet the external sound, the form of words, the structure and the syntax remain the same. The essence of all increase in vision in depth is in some form or other multiple seeing, perception of the truth at different levels in different media simultaneously; not the discarding and the supersession of one truth in favour of another, but the retention and inclusion of the external and the superficial into a deeper and more inward vision; the dual focus involved in "both are true".

Not, let us emphasize, "Both are a little true, a little false", nor yet, "How can we know what is, or is not, true?", but an intensity of apprehension that both are, to the utmost, at the same time, true.

We have seen this principle already at work in different kinds of natural vision in depth; it is an essential outcome of all forms of passive knowledge, but in supernatural vision the element of multiple seeing is intensified beyond recognition; the mind is endowed with a new receptive faculty; it is as though our spiritual eyesight had suddenly been provided with a new lens.

We have seen already how far artistic creation depends upon a specialized receptivity, the sense in which it is the degree of vision, rather than the power of re-expression, that differentiates the creative artist from his fellows. All is there, and we ourselves create nothing; the difference between us lies in our different powers of perception. We have seen that in the natural order there is within our grasp an immense potential extension of vision; we may compare the first stages of the process to the phases of learning to focus better; we can to a great extent develop our natural power of vision, we can extend it from near to far sight, but there is a limit to what the natural eye can ever compass, and if we are to attempt still further seeing we must acknowledge our limitation and accept the help that will be offered. The light of faith is for us like a lens which extends our range in both directions, as it were a telescope-cum-microscope; it does not create new objects of sight, nor of imagination, any more than the microscope and telescope create the new strange worlds that they reveal; it does confer new power in us of seeing what is before us, what has been always there although we did not see it.

It is a principle of faith that the Beatific Vision in which at last we see God as He is is the final destiny of man, towards which all his activities must tend. The vision of God as He is is absolute seeing; if this be true, then all our nature and supernature strain towards a greater power of seeing than we possess. Every stage of increased vision is this progress, from embryo to the perfected being, and all true growth consists in growth in vision, but, and this is the essential point to grasp,



this new power of supernatural seeing is dependent on the abandonment of all claim to see; darkness accepted as the means to light.

"Fill up the water-pots with water", and we can fill them. We are the water-pots and we are filled with water, but God can turn the water into wine; not only at the marriage feast did He do it, but He is doing it all the time, only we are so blind we do not see it.<sup>1</sup>

So with the light of faith; we cannot ourselves extend our powers of vision beyond the limits of our natural sight, but we can choose to accept or to reject the lens of faith that will be offered to us.

The rationalist who rejects the gift of faith is, as we see him, like an astronomer who would refuse to use a telescope on the ground that he prefers to trust his natural sight. He is at liberty, if he so wishes, to limit his own vision in this way, but he cannot reasonably deny what our instrument has shown to us.

Our parallel is, like all parallels, inexact. With either telescope or microscope, although our vision is so far extended in one direction or the other, the extension is still selective and eclectic; we have exchanged our normal scale of seeing for something different, greater or smaller as the case may be; we are unable to look upon the interstellar spaces and the molecule at the same time, with the same focus, nor yet combine either of these new dimensions with the normal sights of here and

<sup>1</sup> St Aug. *In Ev. Joh.*, Tr. ix; cf., Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*:

"For our times are not satisfied with faith, not even with the miracle of turning water into wine: they go further, they change wine into water."

now. It is peculiar to the light of faith that the vision to which it leads is all-inclusive, an unparalleled increase in all dimensions, the epitome of multiple seeing.

## IV

*Limitless Growth*

The analogy of the lens or telescope is a useful illustration of the effect of faith upon our powers of vision, in that it emphasizes the intervention of a new factor in the process of seeing.

As we have discerned in natural vision level below level in our potential seeing, so in the new world of faith we find level beyond level of further and deeper truth to be attained through further growth of a new faith-illuminated insight, but it is essential to realize the utter difference between the two dimensions in which the analogous growth in vision takes place.

There is no evolutionary progress from man to God, from nature to supernature, reason to faith, there is a new beginning, a new birth, a new kind of being and seeing, given by God to men gratuitously, not won by us as the culmination of our own efforts.

This utter difference between nature and grace needs to be constantly re-emphasized, because it is so difficult to grasp, so difficult to recognize in the concrete. We cannot say: "Here is nature and here grace". We cannot at a given point define the frontier between them, yet the difference is one which, given faith, we can not merely accept but apprehend, and only by so doing shall we be able to understand the nature of passive knowledge.

*Bonum gratiae unius majus est, quam bonum naturae totius universi.*<sup>1</sup>

The same assertion is amplified by M. Maritain:

"There is a metaphysical spiritual order beyond sensible nature in which, not only the metaphysician, but also the poet lives; it is above the whole mechanism and all the laws of the corporal universe . . .

"There is still an infinite distance between this order and the order of grace which is above, not only sensible nature, but any created or creatable nature, and above all merely natural exercise of liberty; charity is infinitely further above the highest created spirit than that spirit is above all bodies. The act of faith or love of a little child goes infinitely further, is something infinitely more precious, more vigorous and more efficacious, than the most resplendent natural act of the highest angel."<sup>2</sup>

Against the tendency to level down, to bring down to our level and humanize, we have to stress the extreme difference between nature and grace, yet even in the course of doing so the impulse towards an equalitarian simplification of the new order may insinuate itself from a new angle.

To visualize a long approach of natural knowledge, layer after layer of increased perception, and then a leap to a perfected faith would be to miss the infinite gradations inherent in faith-illuminated understanding, and here the analogy of the lens may prove misleading.

<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Theol.*, Ia, IIae, Q, 113, ad. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Degrees of Knowledge*, ch. VI, 2. Cf. Pascal, *Pensées*, Love of God.

"The infinite distance from bodies to spirits gives some idea of the infinitely more infinite distance from spirits to charity, for charity is supernatural."

While it is true that without faith our power of vision is strictly limited, as is the range of natural eyesight, it is not true that by that gift it is, *ipso facto*, developed to its full capacity.

We have to bear in mind, on the one hand, the immense superiority of the child's act of charity over the natural knowledge of the angel, and yet to realize at the same time the vast extension onwards from the child to the heights of the full mystic's contemplation; a vista which extends beyond our powers of understanding or imagination until the soul is in truth lost in God.

Even in Beatitude, we are assured, there are gradations in the ranks of the Blessed, no level of holiness even there, no equalitarian reduction in the infinite hierarchy of perfection; level beyond level of sanctity attained, level beyond level of glory apprehended.

If once we grasp the nature of vision in depth, the principle of this multiple seeing, we realize that there can be no dead level, no sameness in creation, since all created being is contingent, and there is no absolute quality but in God.

The impulse towards over-simplification seeks to reduce even salvation to the dimension of a "pass degree"; it is the same reduction of perspective with which the traditional fairy story would avert our attention from the real issue implicit in the formula "they married and lived happily ever after", seeking to end at what is but a beginning.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The practice in American Universities of framing examination questions in such a way as to require merely "true" or "false" for answer (and that, in fact, reduced to "T" and "F") is a significant example of this movement.

We may compare the average Christian mind on which the truths of faith have been imprinted but in which they are still unawakened to a photographic plate which has been exposed but not developed; nothing appears upon the opaque surface to distinguish the plate which has been exposed from its fellows; only the action of the developing fluid will bring out in one case and not the other the manifestation of the latent imprint. In the same way the further action of grace will call out a faith that is still latent in the soul which has received it, yet cannot do so in one which has not.

Truth that has been accepted lightly, as a matter of course, becomes active, the image emerges, as on the opaque plate, but there are still infinite gradations in the degree to which it is developed.

Layer upon layer of reality, layer upon layer of understanding, truth at one level including, not superseding, truth of a different kind; and by this gradual process and by it only are we enabled at last to apprehend what it is we believe in and profess.

This process of the continued action of grace is emphasized by spiritual writers:

“For one must realize that these admirable ‘Missions’ (of the Holy Ghost) as principles of supernatural action bring it about that grace does not remain idle but grows, sometimes to such a degree that the soul can be said to change its state, making in itself a sort of newness of grace which raises it out of all comparison above its first sanctification.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chardon, *Croix de Jesus*, p. 450 (quoted Brémond, *op. cit.*, vol. VIII, p. 48).

We have seen how the deepening of natural vision involves an increase of emotional tension which is in itself akin to pain; the actual process of increased sensitivity which is inherent in all passive knowledge would seem to lay the receiving subject open to a certain hyperaesthesia, in which the actual tensivity of life becomes in itself painful, as a bright light will hurt sensitive eyes; the impact of an average sense impression takes on the character of an assault.<sup>1</sup>

When the equivalent process is continued upon the supernatural plane the shock of impact will be proportionately increased. The receiving mind, though itself supernaturalized, is now in contact with what is essentially beyond and above nature, what is in a sense too much for nature; we enter here into a different sphere of potentiality to which there is no limit and no end.

## v

*The Poet as Pharisee*

Recognition of the full difference between nature and grace need not imply a sense of separation if once we accept the principle of the duality of truth, the simultaneous living in two dimensions demanded of us by the doctrine of grace. We may then see the process of passive knowledge as essentially a unity; the increase of natural receptivity leading onwards towards the en-

<sup>1</sup> Keats describes this state explicitly:

"When I am in a room with People if I am ever free from speculating on creatures of my own brain, then, not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little while annihilated." (Letter to Woodhouse, 27 Oct. 1818.)

lightenment of faith; one form of inner vision preparing the way for its own supersession; one harmony, one common movement of the entire soul and mind to God.

All deepening of vision must lead towards the final vision which is God, all increased receptivity must tend towards reception of the divine revelation, all increased sensitivity to beauty should in itself incline us towards more sensitive perception of the beauty of God in His creation, all knowledge should lead on to final knowledge, all love should lead us on to final love.

The vision, the receptivity, the love, which stops short before the leap, is in its very nature incomplete, frustrated, the curve has been impeded and cut short. How is it then that those in whom the natural powers of perception are most especially developed do in fact so often fail to take the leap, or, more exactly, fail to receive the gift of faith? The poet and the philosopher should be, so it would seem, the most religious of men, yet they are not.

It is according to our fallen nature that good is often enemy of the best, since what should be a means becomes an end. The very gift of natural sensitivity that distinguishes the poet from his fellows may, wrongly used, become itself an obstacle to completer vision; he has so much that what he possesses blinds him to the far greater vista of what he lacks. It is not difficult to see how easily he may be so blinded.

The potential deepening of our vision in the purely natural order is in itself so great, the barriers of self-restriction give way to such unsuspected depths of passive nonconceptual perception, that in itself this natural mysticism may prove an obstacle to faith.

What he has thus perceived is, in itself, so far beyond the superficial seeing of the material world of space and time that it is easy to mistake it for the yet further supernatural vision to which it should indeed be but the prelude.

The poet in the matter of inward vision "has great possessions", and he is reluctant to relinquish them.

From whatever angle we approach, from discursive reason, or intuition, from metaphysics or aesthetic perception, we shall perforce arrive at the same cliff's edge; so far and no further can we reach by the extension of our natural powers; "What can I do?"—"So much, and I have done it!"

Is it enough? Sooner or later, whether we will or no, we must answer that question, and faith demands an absolute surrender of all we have acquired and attained, the admission of our own helplessness and inadequacy.

"What can I do?"—"So much and it is nothing."

"What can be done with me?" Whatever God wills.

It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to get to Heaven; but it is not only material riches that impede the road. The riches of the mind, even the moral riches of the natural good, may weigh us down.

I who know so much, who understand so deeply, I who perceive with such exquisite taste the fineness of the texture of creation, how can I be in need of such regeneration as is this ignorant insensitive Philistine? The Pharisee indeed takes many shapes; he may be most pernicious and most benighted when he is most insidiously disguised, but always, in whatever form it



may be, the substance of the Pharisee consists in the claim that he is *special*, that he possesses some special good denied to others.

The light of faith confers upon us undreamed-of enhancement of our vision, an extension of our understanding, an enrichment of our natural powers beyond the power of words to convey, but it is only to be bought at a price, the price of our submission and surrender; the giving up of what we ourselves are or claim to be. Not: "I thank God I am not as other men", but instead: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

And this both poet and philosopher find it particularly hard to say.

## VI

### *Implications of Grace*

The underlying unity discoverable through a development of passive knowledge is indeed essential to our theme, but in this particular connection it is the contrary element, the difference involved in the doctrine of grace, which must be stressed.

This doctrine is in itself so complete a challenge to the whole tendency of the world to-day, it is so alien to the modern mind, that at the risk of some repetition, its implications should be emphasized.

The acceptance of God as manifest, not only in the inherent laws of life as cosmic, not only as operating in the world and in our lives through natural means as a condition of our being, but at the same time and in the same perception, as intervening in time and place, as breaking through the natural order of things in a new

way by act of will and love, involves for us incalculable consequences.

We are committed, did we but realize it, to a revolutionary change of outlook, a scale of values which is in itself a challenge to the whole order of the world around us. What is demanded is in fact a complete reversal of standard, both as to what we hold as true and also as to what we hold as good. We have seen that in all knowledge the objective truth must, in some way, become assimilable before our minds are able to receive it, and in each case the question arises how far the necessary adjustment should be effected in the object or the receiving subject; must the objective truth itself be modified and, if need be, reduced for our reception, or must we rather adapt and, if need be, expand or raise our minds till they are capable of its reception? Here we are at the crux of the whole question; here is the real dividing of the ways.

For the humanist it is human nature which is the norm and standard; what is not human must in consequence be humanized before we can expect to assimilate it. This principle not only sanctions the natural inertia of our minds, it actually supports and justifies it.

However individual and indeed however re-active we may be we are inevitably influenced by our mental environment. We are all living at this moment in a society whose mental atmosphere is in large measure standardized; this means that in a society like our own, moulded and formed by liberal humanism, the natural tendency to reduce all above us to our own level, to avoid the necessity for effort, is incessantly being reinforced by the atmosphere around us. " Make it simple,

make it easy, bring it within the reach of everybody, bring it down to our own level, to the level of our unelevated nature, of our unenlightened understanding" . . . the movement is always downwards, never upward, since a dead level of attainment is an impracticable ideal; it is only in negation, in rejection, that equality is practicable; the equality of non-merit, non-achievement, the horizontal clarity of non-vision.

The doctrine of supernatural grace embodies the absolute contradiction of this process; it puts before us the obligation to be raised ourselves, to raise our way of seeing and knowing, our minds and hearts and all our being, from the just human level to one above it, and it holds out to us at the same time the means by which this supernatural state may be attained. If we accept this doctrine in its full meaning, as an actual reality, the whole direction of our life is altered, and of our thought, and of our way of knowledge. The movement of our grace-illuminated nature must be towards God, towards seeing as He sees. The movement is in the reverse direction; it is far more difficult to achieve and will make far more exacting demands upon us.

In the first place we are committed to a completely theocentric position; not only to a vague belief in God as a First Cause, an Absolute, but as the entire centre of our life, on Whom we are entirely dependent, at every moment, and in all our being. We are called upon to relinquish the comfortable self-satisfaction of the humanist position, the safe assurance of a self-constituted domination, a world in which we may know where we are, what we are doing, and where we are going, in exchange for complete abandonment to

God's will; it is to relinquish the idea of clarity and comprehensibility as the standard of truth, in favour of mystery and darkness, the acceptance of the incomprehensible as transcending what is comprehended; it is the acceptance of a universe in which the creative principle is expressed as in itself apparent contradiction; "unity in trinity and trinity in unity".

It is the acknowledgement of our powerlessness, our utter nothingness apart from God. We cannot even will unless He wills it, we cannot aspire to grace unless He gives the grace to make our aspiration.

This in itself provides a complete challenge to the anthropocentric outlook in which initiative is human, but this reversal is the first step only.

Recognition of God's transcendent power and our dependence is in itself a simple revolution; from self-sufficiency to abjection, from the "I am all" to "I am nothing", the leap may be too easily achieved; what is demanded by the doctrine of grace is far more difficult of apprehension; it is, as in all deeper truth, the synthesis of apparent opposites. It is the exchange of independent action for a new creative passivity; it is the acceptance, as a counterpart of the abandonment of ourselves to God, of a limitless possibility, the liberation from a former bondage, not by escape but by acceptance, not by denial of the fall of man but by realization of the Redemption.

As a consequence of God's intervention, and as a part of it, we have to recognize for and in ourselves, not only our dependence, but our transfiguration, our own adoption as the sons of God.

The reversal of position involved in acceptance of the

doctrine of grace must have a far-reaching influence upon our attitude to all creation; to time and place and all material things. They are no longer final, no longer ends in themselves. We are set free, through grace, from time and place, from the imprisonment of matter, not by flight, not by rejection of them, but through new understanding of their meaning. In their own right, in relation to themselves, created things are deprived of the value that in a purely human view they were accorded, but in exchange they too, in their degree, acquire new value as means through which God manifests His glory.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God—  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil  
It gathers in greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed, . . .<sup>1</sup>

The principle of death and resurrection is summed up in the doctrine of grace; nature in all its forms must die to rise.

## VII

### *Spirit and Matter*

The stripping and annihilation of the mystics, the darkness and the cloud of unknowing, are all, if we could only realize it, but expressions of the same truth, as seen and understood in passive vision, as real and actual and apprehended.

This total reversal of direction is the fundamental implication of acceptance of the doctrine of grace, since if this is accepted the rest follows, but there are

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*.

many inherent consequences which only gradually become apparent; the most far-reaching and the most important of these concerns our attitude to time and place.

We are naturally time-conditioned; we think and move and feel in terms of time; when we try to envisage this higher order of being, the supernatural, our first impulse is to reduce it to a time sequence, as following on our natural existence, first nature and then grace, first reason and then faith, one following the other in the same dimension.

This is to obliterate a vital distinction, to empty the whole conception of its meaning, since the otherness of God and man is its essence. But here as in all our thought the tendency is to over-simplify, to reduce what is hard to grasp to a superficial graspability.

A crude example of this simplification is shown in the common presentation of Heaven as exclusively hereafter and elsewhere; the contrast between "here" and "now", and "then" and "there", conceived in concrete terms of time and place, a tendency which has lent itself, not unfairly, to the taunt of "pie in the sky by and by".

A certain anthropocentric distortion is unavoidable in all use of words that express or attempt to express a reality that is superhuman. In so far as we are ourselves time-conditioned it is natural to conceive in terms of time and place; the contrast between "this" and "the other" presents itself to our minds as "here" and "there", "now" and "then", even though we ourselves may recognize the inadequacy of our expression.

This limitation is, to some extent, a condition of our human existence which we must recognize and accept.

As with our other human limitations it is the recognition that is essential.

But the tendency to materialize, to restrict infinity into finite terms, is not the only danger to beware of. This form of distortion is undoubtedly the first natural impulse, it is, moreover, particularly reinforced to-day by the trend of general opinion, but it is not enough to realize the danger of materialism and leap blindly to the opposite extreme.

The natural tendency of our minds is not so much towards materialism, as such, as to a general oversimplification; the bringing on to one superficial plane of what is multiple and complex.

We find, therefore, in accordance with this rule, that if we reject the first simplification by which the ideas of nature and grace are, as it were, materialized, confined in place and time, we shall be drawn towards the other extreme and try to resolve the tension between matter and spirit by the denial of matter; if we are not to concentrate on time we shall repudiate it altogether.

The tendency to over-spiritualize is a less explicit danger in modern Western civilization, but it is none the less endemic throughout the history of religious thought. It is the characteristic error of Oriental spirituality, and in our own background it is present in all the various forms of Idealism, and of the heresies connected with it.

At any time of materialist dominance there will inevitably be an undercurrent of extreme spiritism, and to many individual minds to-day this is the most alluring form in which the universal impulse to escape the tension of truth presents itself.

There is, of course, a sense in which an extreme spiritism must be the first phase in all deeper vision, since passive vision consists essentially in the perception of a spiritual reality below material appearances and the new truth we are apprehending is the intense reality of spirit.

To some quite simple minds spiritual reality is a natural assumption; in primitive peoples and many children the borderline between spirit and matter is indistinct to a degree that can be disconcerting, but this awareness of the spiritual is all too easily obliterated by our present form of civilization, and for the average modern man the reality of the spirit comes often as a startling revelation. He feels, and rightly feels, that he has found a truth of inestimable significance; the world is changed for him; his life is changed; he is no longer imprisoned as he was, within the limits of the "here" and "now"; the barrier is rolled back, the door opened, his whole horizon infinitely expanded; and in this state of glad illumination he is inclined to discard altogether the superseded means of time and place, through which or, as he now feels, in spite of which his spiritual vision has been apprehended.

The sense of exaltation and liberation to be attained through depreciation of matter is too well known to need emphasis here. Not only Oriental mysticism but much of our own philosophic thought, in the varied developments of Platonism, holds out to us in fascinating forms the ideal of escape from place and time.

There is a sublimity about the highest forms of Platonism which rightly captivates the mind, and it is difficult to appreciate that, even so purified and exalted,



the flight from tension is no real solution. The hold which an extreme idealism has always had, and has, upon the mind must not be minimized because to-day it seems the less immediate danger. The doctrine of grace requires us to break through the limitations of a time-place concept, and yet at the same time to make use of it; to apprehend a different kind of existence going on simultaneously, in and through the natural order, not superseding, not replacing it, not following on it in a time dimension, but at the same time, in the same place, in the same soul, in the same circumstances; the multiplicity in one of truth.

If we envisage this extreme spiritism to be a first and not a final stage in the growth of spiritual vision we shall have courage to continue further, to reach a deeper level of perception in which we are enabled to see in two dimensions, spirit in matter, eternity in time, God in man, the Christian vision of the Incarnation.

This principle of, as it were, bifocal seeing is so specifically contained in the acceptance of Christian revelation that we can best attempt to illustrate it by reference to the Gospels themselves, and to the different levels of vision involved in understanding the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

### VIII

#### *The Incarnation*

At the first superficial level we read the Gospel as a narrative of events, taken at their face value, factually; it is a tragic and miraculous account of a historic occurrence long ago in a remote part of the Roman Empire.

We are moved to sympathy, to horror, to admiration, as at any other recital of the heroic; it is real as any other historic event is real, but it is far away and long ago.

This is the first level of reality, concerned with temporal and material fact, but since the material in question is not in fact adapted for such treatment this attitude towards it is not long satisfying. The purely materialistic interpretation will not explain the Christian Gospel to us any more than it will explain the world around us.

There is, we find, a seeming contradiction between the real and the ideal in the narrative before us; the pieces do not fit at the same level; we find an element of the impossible which we endeavour to resolve, as usual, by an over-simplification.

Two forms of simplification are open to us; the first, and by far the most usual, is by rejection of the supernatural and reduction of the non-material to matter.

The story, as it stands, has points of weakness; there are, we find, discrepancies in detail in the separate versions we are given; there is a surprising lack of corroboration from contemporary Roman sources; moreover, the story in itself is unconvincing.

This is the first attempt at increased vision, the movement is discursive, horizontal; we bring our active reason into play and try to relate the facts put before us to the principles of reality as we know them, to our own experience of life, lived as in such a frame of mind we live it, externally and on the surface, and the result is negative and destructive. We find no revelation, but a myth.

The second form of simplification lies in the process we have just now considered, the development of our

power of vision into an extreme spirituality for which material and temporal fact can, when inconvenient, be rejected. What we look for now is only symbolic meaning; actual historic truth becomes of no importance. For this second stage of increased vision the account of our Lord's death and resurrection and ascension is allegory pure and simple; it has no factual historic truth, but is of no less value on that account. Our thought and powers of apprehension have escaped from time and place; we are living in a world of pure ideas.

To such a state of mind the borderline between reality and myth is immaterial, we cease to recognize it. Myth is for us, as for the materialist, the antithesis of historic truth, it is in the commonly accepted sense of the word unreal, a substitute for truth, but for this state of mind reality has itself taken on a different meaning. We have perceived, or so it seems to us, an ultimate spiritual reality apart from, and in contrast to, the world of things.

This is the world of the Platonic Ideas, the Archetypes of Gnosticism and the Manichees in all their multitudinous transmigrations, from Buddhism to Hegelian Metaphysics, and as a never silenced under-current it is the world of our own dreams.

This second version of over-simplification is, as we have already pointed out, an immense advance upon the first, in that it does accept for the first time the reality of the "hidden present", the secret truth behind appearances; it is the first phase of true passive vision, but it is still an over-simplification, still a flight from the real mystery, the living and the seeing in two dimensions required of us by a final vision.

The right relation between spirit and matter, between time and non-time, is fundamental to the doctrine of grace; if we are to attempt to apprehend it we must be prepared to see in two dimensions, in two media, not either-or, as we should tend to see, but both at once, and all of both. The demand made upon our understanding grows ever greater as our vision deepens, as we see further what is implied. It is indeed a mental *tour de force*; the moving in two directions at the same moment, the circus rider's balance upon two horses apt at any moment to break apart.

Through faith, and only through the light of faith, may we come to that deeper state of vision in which the truth is seen as actual at different levels at the same time, not as alternative, still less conflicting, but as essentially inseparable. The spiritual meaning is seen *in* the material, the inner meaning *in* the historic event, the reality of the world of time and place is understood as the vehicle of eternal truth.

This third stage of vision, if we attain it, is rebirth. It is as though the blood returned to flow through the veins of a body drained of life and what was lifeless and inanimate, a discarded and rejected thing, gradually comes to life before our eyes.

It is the Incarnation become real; it is the Word made flesh, the Word which we had tried to find among the stars; the disembodied Logos of Plotinus, remote, ethereal, escaping from us, and from the world of flesh and time and place, has indeed come down to dwell among us, and we have at last beheld His glory.

In the mysteries of the Gospel as seen in faith-

illuminated vision we do at last accept the apparent conflict inherent in the nature of life and things as the creative principle of existence; we see the polarity and tension which we have fled from, as no longer dangerous but essential, no opposition to the laws of nature, but the essential law of nature and supernature, in the mystery of God made man.

When once we have attained this dual vision there is no limit to its operation; it will enrich and illumine all we see. All time and place and things are seen as instruments of transcendent meaning, yet keeping their own value at their own level; we have perceived the multiplicity in one of truth.

We see the seasons, night and day, water and trees, darkness and light as the images of eternal truth, not ending in themselves their natural functions, but in this deeper vision we have reached these material things do not become unreal because they are endowed with deeper meaning. The tree we look at has not ceased to be a real tree, it still gives shade and moisture for agriculture, it is still the means of obtaining timber, though we may see it as the Tree of Life. Water does not cease to quench our thirst because for us it is the Living Water.

The material world is not less but more real because we see it with this dual vision; it has been given back to us from death, reconciled and transformed and glorified.

Because the sacrifice of Christ took place in time and place the principle of death and resurrection has become not merely a cosmic law of being but salvation; not merely the dying and rebirth of the year or of the

day but of the soul; not merely a general principle of the soul's spiritual regeneration but the means of personal redemption; not abstract nor theoretic but dynamic; a matter no longer of intellect but of will.

We have spoken so far in terms of intellect, of perception, as though it were in itself a thing apart, but the perception of God in grace is inseparable from charity.

Again it is no question of a time sequence; not first we know and then we love, but knowledge that is love, and a love that is knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

"The Lord is a God of knowledge",<sup>2</sup> but also: "No man cometh to the Father but through Me." In whatsoever degree we apprehend it, however fragmentary and incomplete, the vision of God through love may not be formulated and set apart in an extrinsic work of art; its medium of re-expression is ourselves. If we aspire to share the mystic's vision we must attempt to share his sanctity, and as with the intellectual challenge of supra-rational knowledge, so now in our personal lives we have to meet the parallel challenge of supra-rational goodness, of sanctity, in the paradox of our redemption.

It is not the stoical indifference which can impassively endure the blows of fate, not even happiness in spite of suffering, not victory in spite of defeat, not gain in spite of loss, but joy *in* pain, victory *in* defeat, life *in* death; the paradox and the folly of the Cross.

<sup>1</sup> "Warmth precedes light, and it is the warmth of charity which produces knowledge of truth." (St Thomas, in *Ev. John*, V. I., vi.)

<sup>2</sup> I Kings, ii. 3.

If once we begin to see with this new vision we are committed to the Way of Christ.

"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life."

It is only through some degree of passive vision that such words can make their impact upon our resistant minds, but in the measure that they do so will our response to, or reaction from them, take on a wholly different intensity. The truth accepted readily enough on the superficial level, almost, it may be, as a matter of course, without significance or consequence, faces us now with terrifying force, a wholly new and unsuspected thing; what is asked of us we begin to see.

Instead of knowledge we are offered not knowing, instead of self-sufficiency dependence, instead of self-fulfilment sacrifice; to know nothing, to have nothing, to be nothing.

The emptying of ourselves that God may fill us, the dying to ourselves that God may rise, is no mere abstract theory of perfection, no esoteric mystical technique, but the way of salvation, way of life.

The command laid upon us by our new knowledge is not a council of safety but of perfection; it is:

"Take up the Cross and follow Me."

Not escape from life, but to live dangerously; life at the maximum, and absolute death; at last the life and death of God Himself.

Not let us love a little in order to suffer little, but to love utterly, with our whole heart and our whole soul and with all our strength, and as a consequence of such potent loving, and in the measure that we may attain it, to share the suffering of Christ.

In this new light goodness and truth are one, know-

ledge and love cannot be separated, for from whatever angle we approach it the end that we have sought is found in Christ.

*Quoniam apud Te est fons vitae, et in lumine Tuo videbimus lumen.*









